Political and Religious Ideologies on Parthian Coins of the 2nd-1st Centuries BC

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Brief Abstract

This thesis examines a key period of change in Parthian coinage, as the rebellious Parthian satrapy transitioned first from a nomadic to sedentary kingdom in the second half of the 3rd century BC, and then into a great empire during the 2nd-early 1st century BC. The research will focus on the iconography and inscriptions that were employed on the coinage in order to demonstrate how Parthian authorities used these objects to convey political and religious ideologies to a diverse audience.

The Parthian Empire reached its greatest territorial extent under the Parthian king Mithradates II (c. 121-91 BC), stretching from Bactria (modern northern Afghanistan) in the east to the River Euphrates (modern Iraq) in the west. Various kingdoms from this vast landscape were brought under Parthian control. The coinage issued by the ruling kings was an effective means of propagating their ideologies on royal authority and divine legitimacy. The numismatic material is the only continuous source of primary evidence that has survived the Parthian period (c. 247 BC-AD 224), encompassing the diverse cultural, social and economic circles of its makers and handlers. It has, nevertheless, remained an understudied source of evidence for this period.

The following research questions will be addressed:

1. How can we form a better understanding of the Arsacids' transition from their tribal origins to an imperial successor of the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty and the Achaemenid kings of preceding centuries?

2. Did the Arsacid dynasty perceive itself as a continuation of the deep-rooted Iranian tradition, and interweave its history into the existing narrative of Iran's legendary and historical kings?

3. Using numismatic evidence, how can we better understand the revival of Mazdaean ideology within the iconography of the ruling Arsacid dynasty, particularly at a time when its rituals and hymns were performed orally across different centres of tradition?

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At its greatest territorial extent, the Parthian Empire stretched from Bactria (modern northern Afghanistan) in the east to the River Euphrates (modern Iraq) in the west. In the north, its boundaries reached Upper Mesopotamia, along the lower edge of the Caspian Sea, and across the arid desert towards the Oxus River (modern Karakum Desert of Turkmenistan, and the Amu Darya River); to the south the Arsacid kings wielded power over maritime trade routes along the Persian Gulf. Various kingdoms within this vast landscape were brought under Parthian rule. The 2nd and 1st centuries BC were a period of fast expansion during the reigns of Mithradates I (c. 165-132 BC) and Mithradates II (c. 121-91 BC): territories in Bactria, Media and Mesopotamia were captured by the former, while the latter crystallised his imperial power after rebellions were subdued in Characene and Elymais in the south-west of the empire, as well as nomadic invasions in the north-east. Mithradates II, furthermore, established a strong presence on the border with Armenia by seizing Media Atropatene and taking the young Armenian prince Tigranes hostage – a political move that caught the attention of the Roman world. In 96 BC, a meeting was arranged on the River Euphrates between Parthian and Roman representatives in order to discuss the balance of power in the wider region. Meanwhile in the east, diplomatic relations between the Parthian court and the Han dynasty of China began to flourish, despite the

warring and migratory movements of tribes across Central Asia. After Mithradates II's death, the Empire was seemingly plunged into a "Dark Age" (c. 91-57 BC) that is characterised by dynastic feuds. Due to the lack of written accounts on this period of Parthian history, it is often seen as little more than a fragile patchwork of alliances between semi-autonomous regions. The contemporary coin evidence, however, tells a much more vivid story of developing kingship ideologies within the ruling Arsacid dynasty.

The coinage issued by the Parthian overlords became the most effective means of propagating their ideologies concerning royal authority and divine legitimacy. Parthian authorities engaged in widespread monetary production across their imperial sphere, establishing mints from Margiana to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Moreover, coinage was collected and dispersed through various types of exchange, such as labour and land contracts, merchant's trade, soldier's pay, and votive offerings. The numismatic material is the only continuous source of primary evidence that survives from the outset of Parthia's imperial history to its final days, encompassing the diverse cultural, social and economic circles of its makers and handlers.

Across the Parthian Empire, the vestiges of Hellenism overlapped with native cultures. In the sphere of religion, the traditions of the Greek, Mazdaean, and Mesopotamian divine worlds co-existed. Against this backdrop of political expansion and rivalry, and intense cultural and religious diversity, the coinage of this period reflects important ideas about how the Parthian Empire viewed itself from the perspectives of its sovereign kings. The coinage has, nevertheless, remained an understudied source of evidence. The following key questions and themes will be address in this thesis:

4. **Political transformation**: how can we form a better understanding of the Arsacids' transition from their tribal origins to an imperial successor of the Hellenistic Seleucid dynasty and the Achaemenid kings of preceding centuries? Why has this transition been misconstrued through secondary (usually Greek or Roman) historical texts, and what picture

does the primary numismatic and archaeological evidence present instead?

5. **Legend and legacy**: did the Arsacid dynasty perceive itself as a continuation of the deep-rooted Iranian tradition, and interweave its history into the existing narrative of Iran's legendary and historical kings? Moreover, how did the Arsacids' image of power and divine splendour impact the wider region and the reigns of later kings?

6. **Religious tradition**: using numismatic evidence, how can we better understand the revival of Mazdaean ideology within the iconography of the ruling Arsacid dynasty, particularly at a time when its rituals and hymns were performed orally across different centres of tradition? How did the established images of the divine in Hellenistic coin iconography transform under Arsacid rule?

II. Sources

1. Greek and Latin Authors

As no extensive historical account of this period has survived from a native Parthian author, scholarship has habitually relied on foreign accounts written by western Greek and Latin authors, as well as some late antique writers from the western sphere. While these accounts do provide substantive evidence reflecting the experiences and opinions of foreign observers, it is important to stress the problematic nature of these sources and to scrutinise the political and cultural context in which they were written. The accounts referenced across this thesis are the following:[1]

Ammianus Marcellinus (4th c. AD)	*Res Gestae*
Appian (c. AD 95-165)	*Syrica*; *Mithridatic Wars*
Arrian (c. AD 86-160)	*Anabasis of Alexander; Parthica*
Augustus (63 BC-AD 14)	*Res Gestae*
Cassius Dio (c. AD 155-235)	*Roman History*
Diodorus Siculus (c. 1st c. BC)	*Historical Library*
George Syncellus (8th-9th c. AD)	*Chronicle*
Isidore of Charax (1st c. BC-AD)	*Parthian Stations*
Josephus (c. AD 37-100)	*Antiquities of the Jews*
Justin (3rd c. AD)	*Epitome of Pompeius Trogus' Philippic History* (written in the 1st c. BC)
Lucian (2nd c. AD)	*Macrobii*
Moses of Chorene (c. AD 410-490)	*History of Armenia*
Pliny the Elder (AD 23-79)	*Natural History*
Plutarch (AD 46-120)	*Life of Sulla; Life of Crassus*
Polybius (c. 200-118 BC)	*Histories*

[1] A complete list of Greek and Latin authors who have written about the Parthians has been gathered by Hackl *et al*. (2010). Rose (2011), 70 adds to these accounts the books of the Hebrew Bible that were contemporary with the Parthian period, *Esther* and *Daniel*, as well as the deuterocanonical *Maccabees* and *Tobit*. These sources highlight several Achaemenid court institutions that remained familiar in the Parthian period. Moreover, they shed some light on relations between Mazdaean worshippers and Jews.

Ptolemy (AD 90-168)	*Geography*
Strabo (c. 64/63 BC-AD 24)	*Geography*
Tacitus (AD 56-120)	*Annals*

The backgrounds of many of these authors demonstrate that their accounts were constructed on observations made from behind enemy lines. While some authors such as Cassius Dio, Arrian and Strabo were born in Asia Minor and perhaps held a more familiar understanding of eastern culture, these men were ethnically Greek and politically aligned with Rome. Strabo was born in Amaseia into a family that held high positions in the court of Mithradates VI of Pontus; nevertheless, the geographer became a Roman subject once the region was incorporated into the Republic in 63 BC. Arrian and Cassius Dio both originated from the Roman province of Bithynia, and held high political and military positions. It is likely that Arrian served in Parthia until his appointment as Consul in AD 129 or 130, and in AD 131 he became Governor of Cappadocia and commanded the Roman legions on the Armenian frontier. Likewise, Cassius Dio dedicated much of his life to public service, and also held the position of Consul twice. Relations between Rome and Parthia were unstable, and a scornful agenda towards the eastern superpower on the part of the former is evident from many works written in Greek and in Latin. Plutarch's *Life of Sulla*, 5.4 reports a politically charged exchange of communications that took place on the River Euphrates between the Roman general Sulla and a "barbarian" Parthian envoy. This meeting, however, led to increased tensions and mistrust between the two empires. Parthia proved itself to be a mighty conqueror of the Seleucids and an strong rival to Rome, a fact confessed by Justin (41.1.7) and evident from Josephus' accounts of Seleucid defeats at the hands of the Arsacid kings (*Antiquities*, 13.5.1, 13.8.4, 13.14.3, to cite a few examples).

In addition to contemporary Parthian conflicts, the cultural memory of the well-chronicled Graeco-Persian wars (492-449 BC) allowed these authors to perpetuate the familiar anti-Persian genre for their audiences at home, and reinvigorate the image of oriental despotism and barbarianism. These prevailing attitudes can be seen in Augustus' monumental text, the *Res Gestae*,

which was transcribed in Latin and Greek, and erected throughout the Roman Empire. The emperor's account (§29) tells of events in 20 BC, when he forced (*coegi*/*ἠνάγκασα*) the Parthians as supplicants (*supplices*/*ἱκέτας*) to return the Roman standards that were lost in battles led by Crassus in 53 BC and Lucius Decidius Saxa in 40 BC. What had started as a rare celebration of diplomacy between the two empires swiftly became a political triumph in Augustus' propaganda scheme. Augustus minted silver denarii to commemorate this event, with the reverse showing a Parthian soldier handing over a Roman standard on his knees.[2]

In addition to the biases against their political opponents, the majority of these authors wrote from a western tradition that remained geographically and culturally distanced from the numerous Iranian and Mesopotamian populations scattered across the Parthian Empire, as well as minority subjects on the fringes.[3] It is evident that some of the authors' information was relayed to them from a third party, such as earlier historians, merchants trading in the region or military forces engaged in conflicts against the Parthians.[4] Although Strabo claims to have witnessed certain cultural practices first hand, the author also frequently admits that some of his information has been taken from earlier accounts and from word of mouth. In his descriptions of various Scythian tribes, the geographer contrasts cultural variations in areas such as funerary practices; however, he portrays these traditions often in gruesome, cannibalistic detail in order to shock his Roman audience of the alien, eastern practices. The geographer states that the Derbices living near the Caspian Sea chopped up their deceased relatives to be eaten; whereas the nearby Caspians starved their elderly to death and left the corpses exposed in the desert (11.11.8). The bewilderment conveyed in these tales exposes his lack of understanding of these far-away practices. Certain aspects of Iranian traditions were also whitewashed over in the culturally distanced writings of these authors. In

[2] RIC 1, 287-287, 304-305, 314-315.
[3] Josephus is an exception, being of Jewish origin.
[4] Ptolemy is known to have relied on information from an earlier work by Marinos of Tyre, as well as Roman and ancient Persian gazetteers. Likewise, Strabo's sources include "Artemidorus, Eratosthenes, Poseidonius, Demetrius of Scepsis, Apollodorus [of Artemita]", amongst others as noted in Drijvers (1998), 280.

particular, Boyce has noted that the varying Zoroastrian priestly titles '*herbad,*' '*magbad*' and '*bagnapat*' were all reduced to the generic term '*magi*' in Greek and Latin accounts.[5]

Although these sources must be treated cautiously as evidence, they do provide an insight into the ways in which Parthian culture and ideology differed from that of the Greeks and Romans. Rose has noted that Plutarch, although he writes of political clashes involving the Romans, also spent part of his life as a Delphic priest and, ultimately, was more concerned with the "moral substance" of those who achieved great victories.[6] Classicists and historians generally rely on these textual accounts to reconstruct aspects of the Parthian world, but less frequently include primary evidence from the Iranian world (such as the coinage). It is essential to read beyond the agendas that inspired these Greek and Latin accounts in order to identify the realities of the period and the ideologies that shaped it. These accounts are examined in greater detail in Chapter One.

2. Chinese Authors

During the reign of Mithradates II, the Chinese diplomat and explorer Zhang Qian reached the Parthian Empire and established contact with the Arsacid court at Nisa. From this moment onwards, Parthian-Chinese relations developed on an official level, with trade and diplomatic missions passing between the two powers. The historical accounts of Chinese authors of the Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) are less commonly cited in modern historical studies of the Parthian Empire.[7] This is perhaps due to the fact that these diplomatic parties primarily dealt with the eastern edge of the Parthian Empire and gave only vague references to the western side (the direction from which the majority of scholars approach the Parthian sphere and its vassal states). Three Chinese sources are used in this thesis.

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[5] Boyce (1979) [2001], 97-98.
[6] Rose (2011), 71.
[7] Wang, T. (2007) has most recently examined the Chinese sources in connection with their comments on the Parthian Empire.

The most relevant work for the period of Mithradates II's reign is Sima Qian's (c. 145/135-86 BC) *Records of the Grand Historian* or *Shiji*, which is based on the account of the diplomat Zhang Qian (died c. 113 BC). Both Sima Qian and Zhang Qian were contemporaries of the Arsacid king, Mithradates II, who is reported to have sent a substantial escort of horsemen to accompany Zhang Qian's assistant envoys.[8] Two later accounts are provided in Ban Gu's (AD 32-92) *Hanshu*, and Fan Ye's (AD 389-445) *Hou Hanshu*, which both mixed information gleaned from earlier periods with their later material. These sources present an interesting perspective on Arsacid affairs that contrasts with that of the Greek and Roman accounts. The content reflects the different criteria applied to the observation of the Iranian empire by their eastern neighbours, who were primarily concerned with the exploration of new westward routes from China, with the resources and exotic goods that could be acquired here, with surveys of the military potential of these regions, and with the tribute that could potentially be extracted from them.

Although these Chinese sources are presented in a very factual narrative, it is important to remain conscious of the limitations of these sources. Like the authors writing in Greek and Latin, the Chinese interpreted Parthian customs from their own cultural perspective. The accounts reveal the underdeveloped state of relations between the two imperial powers by confusing certain geographic details of Parthia's western reaches, as well as erroneous comments on particular customs (e.g. that the Arsacids struck the image of the king on one side of their coinage, and of the queen on the reverse side; this is only true of issues minted by Phraataces and Musa over a short period from 2 BC-AD 4).[9] The inherent ideology of the Chinese chroniclers emerges in these writings, in which the supreme Han dynasty reigns at the heart of the 'Middle Kingdom' and is surrounded by obscure kingdoms and peoples.

[8] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 278.
[9] Loewe (1979); 5-11; Wang, T. (2007), 94-95, 101-102.

3. The *Avesta* and its Pahlavi Version

While the ancient Avesta and its later Pahlavi translations and commentaries are important sources for interpreting the religious ideology of the Arsacid kings, it is essential to understand the difficulties of using the sacred Zoroastrian texts for this particular period. The principal texts referred to in this thesis include the following.

Avestan Ritual Texts

The seventy-two chapters of the *Yasna* are recited daily by priests in the fire temple during the central ritual of the Zoroastrian religion. At its core are the chapters known as the *Gathas* (Y.28-34, 43-54) and the *Yasna Haptanghaiti* (Y.35-42), which were originally composed orally in Old Avestan (see below on the transmission of the *Avesta* into text).[10] These texts are homogenous in character and are commonly dated to around the 2nd millennium BC.[11] At the very heart of the *Yasna* is the pivotal transformation of the sacrificial fire (Y.36), in which this pure element and its light are consecrated as the manifestation of the divine Ahura Mazda.[12] The other parts of the *Yasna* (Y.1-27, Y.55-72, as well as the interposed chapters Y.35.1, Y.42, 52) were also composed orally, but in Young Avestan. These texts are heterogeneous in character, and were composed at different periods in time by various priests of the Mazdayasnian tradition. Kellens estimates that at least four centuries had lapsed since the composition of the Old Avestan texts, while some aspects show developmental similarities to inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings in Old Persian (6th-4th centuries BC).[13] The *Visperad* and *Videvdad* are liturgical texts in Young Avestan. In Zoroastrian

[10] Skjærvø (2012), 42-43 summarises the components within the *Avesta* that demonstrate its oral character.

[11] Under the reforms of the Mazdaean prophet Zarathustra (Zoroaster from the Greek), Ahura Mazda was elevated as a supreme, monotheistic deity out of the numerous deities of the Old Iranian tradition. More precise dates for Zarathustra's religious activity have been extensively debated, the earliest ranging from 1500-1200 BC, with other dates estimated at c. 1000 BC, or even as late as the 6th century BC; Hintze (2009), 25-26 with notes 64-66, which gives more extensive bibliographic details on this long-standing discussion.

[12] Hintze (2009), 18-20.

[13] Kellens (1989), 36; *ibid.* (2006), 260-262; Panaino (1989a) [1992], 164-173; Lazard (1990), 219; Skjærvø (1995), 162 ff.; *ibid*. (1999); Hintze (2014a) [2014].

ritual practice, they are intercalated into the *Yasna* at certain points and recited at particular ceremonies.

Avestan Devotional Texts

The Avestan devotional texts comprise the *Yashts* (a group of twenty-one hymns dedicated to various divine beings[14]) and the *Khorde Avesta* (a collection of texts used principally by lay people in everyday life). These texts were originally compiled orally in Young Avestan, and are heterogeneous in character. Like the *Yasna*, no absolute dates for these texts are available. However, on the basis of relative chronology, they are usually dated to the first half of the first millennium BC (notably, during the same period in which the Medes and Persians had migrated to the Iranian Plateau).[15] Kellens divides the majority of the *Yashts* into two categories: those that are 'legendary' in character (describing episodes in which figures from the legendary past, such as warriors or kings, worship the prescribed *yazatas*) or those that are 'hymnic' (whereby the *yazatas* are worshipped directly by those participating in the ceremony in real time).[16] However, the distinction between these two categories is largely artificial, since all *Yashts* concern the worship of the *yazatas* during sacrifice, as well as the entreaty of boons from these divine beings and their protection from evil forces or *daevas*.[17] A more practical distinction can be made between Greater and Minor *Yashts*. While the former preserve a good standard of Young Avestan, the latter are generally seen as

[14] Gershevitch (1959) [1967], 13 rather schematically categorises these divine beings into three types: 1) those appearing in Zarathustra's doctrine, the *Gathas*; 2) certain non-Zarathustrian divinities who are nevertheless Indo-Iranian in origin or have equivalents in the *Vedas*; 3) certain notions present in Zarathustra's doctrine that have been recast as divine beings (e.g. Ashi, or Sraosha). However, these divisions are now considered outdated. More recently, Hintze (2014a) [2014] has proposed four distinct groups: 1) the divine beings with Indo-Iranian roots, namely Haoma, Mithra and Verethragna; 2) the Iranian divine beings Anahita, Druvaspa and the *Khvarnah*; 3) the divine beings who embody natural phenomena, such as the Sun/Xwarshed, Moon/Mah, Wind/Vayu, and the stars Tishtrya and Vanant; and 4) the *yazatas* that are specifically Zoroastrian in character, i.e. Ahura Mazda, the Amesha Spentas 'Bounteous Immortals', the Fravashis 'Chosen Ones', Asha 'Truth', Haurvatat 'Wholeness', Sraosha 'Hearkening', Rashnu 'Justice', Chista 'Insight' and Ashi 'Good Reward'.

[15] Hintze (2014a) [2014] discusses the various theories relating to the dating of these texts.

[16] Kellens (1978); Skjærvø (1994), 212 ff., 233.

[17] Stewart (2007), 141-144; Hintze (2009), 57-59; *ibid*. (2014a) [2014].

younger compositions, shorter in length, repetitive and inferior in their grammatical and poetic structure.[18]

The Pahlavi Version of the Avesta *and Other Pahlavi Works*

The Pahlavi translations of and commentaries on the *Avesta* were composed over an extended period of time. While the Pahlavi version of the *Avesta* provides a meticulous word-for-word translation (with little divergence from the original Avestan syntax and grammar), the commentaries elaborate on aspects of religion, cosmology, history, law and morality.[19] Their content was based on the ancient Avestan material, but strongly reflected contemporary ideas and perceptions of the Sasanian and post-Sasanian commentators.[20]

The memory of the Arsacid kings in the Pahlavi literature presents problems for the historical interpretation of the Parthian period. Vologases I of Parthia (c. AD 51-78) is remembered as the first king since Alexander's conquest of Persia to attempt to gather a written version of the *Avesta*, according to the Pahlavi compendium *Denkard*, a work that was largely influenced by the writings of two high priests of Fars (Persis) in south-western Iran, Adurfarrbay-i Farroxzadan (c. AD 815-835) and Adurbad-i Emedan (c. 10th century AD).[21] However, more recent studies suggests that the earliest possible translations and commentaries on the *Avesta* were carried out in the 3rd century AD under Ardashir I's high priest Tansar.[22] This high priest is known from the

[18] Malandra (1983), 27; Hintze (2014a) [2014]. The 'Greater Yashts' (named so based on their greater length and the quality of their composition) include *Yashts* 5 (addressed to Anahita of the Waters), 8 (Tishtrya, the star Sirius), 9 (Druvaspa, '[Possessesing] Sound Horses'), 10 (Mithra of 'Contract' and 'Oath'), 14 (Verethragna, the 'Smiter of Resistance'), 17 (Ashi of 'Recompense') and 19 (Khvarnah 'Divine Glory'). The 'Minor Yashts' (shorter in length, as well as metrically and grammatically inferior) comprise *Yashts* 1 (Ahura Mazda), 2 (the Amesha Spentas), 3 (Asha Vahishta 'Best Truth'), 4 (Haurvatat 'Wholeness' and 'Perfection'), 6 (Khwarshed, the 'Radiant Sun'), 7 (Mah, the 'Moon'), 18 (Ashtad), 20 (Haoma), and 21 (the star Vanant). Skjærvø (1994), 233-240 questions the judgement behind elevating some *Yashts* as superior to others, and considers the so-called 'Minor Yashts' more as apotropaic hymns.

[19] Macuch (2009), 126-128.

[20] Cantera (2004); Macuch (2009), 129; Hintze (2014b), 12-13 on recent scholarship that has dealt with the translation of the *Avesta*.

[21] *Denkard*, Books 3-4; Macuch (2009), 126, 130-136.

[22] Macuch (2009), 125-126. The written translations and accompanying commentaries were later revised under Khosrow I in the 6th century.

propagandistic political treatise known as the *Letter of Tansar*. This document has survived as a 13th century Persian translation of a lost Arabic manuscript, which was rendered from an earlier Pahlavi text.[23] In this letter, the high priest claims that Ardashir I found the "laws of religion corrupt and confused, and heresy and innovations rife" following his victory over the Arsacid dynasty in AD 224.[24] This same attitude that sought to lessen the memory of the Arsacid kings is also evident in a second compendium known as the *Greater Bundahishn*, thought to have been composed sometime between the Sasanian period and the 9th century AD.[25] In this work, the Arsacid period (which lasted for almost half a millennium) is not even addressed; the narrative moves from the conquest of Alexander and the breaking up of the Persian Empire into kingdoms governed by ninety petty rulers, to the investiture of Ardashir I.[26]

Transmission of the Avesta

Although the exact origins of the *Avesta* are not definitively known, the language of these texts indicates that they were composed orally somewhere in what is now modern southern Central Asia.[27] The Avestan language of the eastern Iranian territories and the Old Persian language spoken by the Achaemenid kings in the southern Persis region represent all that has survived of the Old Iranian family of languages; however, they constitute two divergent linguistic branches. Zarathustra's teachings were transmitted between priestly worshippers according to a faithful oral tradition which preserved the prayers in the original Old Avestan language, while Pseudo-Old Avestan passages inserted into the *Yasna* demonstrate a desire to retain a veneer of archaism. Although the language evolved into Young Avestan (which had linguistic

[23] Macuch (2009), 181 with note 214 discusses the difficulties in dating the original *Letter of Tansar*, with opinions ranging from the time of Ardashir I in the 3rd century AD, to the reigns of Khosrow I in the 6th century, and Yazdegird III in the 7th century.
[24] Translation in Boyce (1968), 46.
[25] Macuch (2009), 137-139.
[26] *Greater Bundahishn*, 33.14-15.
[27] Gnoli (1987) [2011] outlines various discussions concerning the precise geographic origins of the Avestan language.

similarities to Old Persian[28]), the repeated refrain in the *Yashts* "Thus Ahura Mazda told Zarathustra" served to cast the newer and eclectic hymns as part of Zarathustra's earliest revelations.[29] However, while these developmental stages in the Avestan language can be drawn out, it is important not to give a false impression of the linguistic complexities that arise from the continuous oral transmission of the *Avesta* over centuries.[30]

The *Avesta* that is extant today was committed to writing in the late Sasanian period using the Pazand script, a form of writing that was based on the Pahlavi script and devised for rendering the sound of the ancient Avestan language.[31] By this period the compilers of the sacred texts had an incomplete knowledge of Avestan, which was no longer a living language; this is evident from misinterpretations of Avestan vocabulary and grammar in the Pahlavi translations.[32] The chronology for the appearance of an earlier written *Avesta* has been question in scholarship.[33] Later Pahlavi sources report the existence of a written *Avesta* that was stored in the royal treasury at Persepolis, and which was subsequently destroyed by Alexander in 330 BC during his conquest of Iran.[34] With the textual remains of the *Avesta* burnt and scattered, it was believed that the sacred hymns rescinded into obscurity until they were reincorporated into scripture once again in the late Parthian or early Sasanian period. In the *Denkard*, it is stated that the Parthian king Walaxš (Vologases I, c. AD 51-78) gave orders for the vestiges of the sacred book to be gathered together into a unified volume once again. From the time of the Sasanian king Ardashir I (AD 224-242), the same source claims that an official written Avestan tradition was fully restored in Iran.[35] Scholarship has considered other evidence

[28] See Hintze (1998), 154, note 40 with bibliography on Hoffmann (1971), 64-73; *ibid*. (1979), 89-93; Hoffmann & Narten (1989); Hoffmann & Forssman (1996), 34-37.
[29] Gershevitch (1959) [1967], 13; Hintze (2009), 28.
[30] Skjærvø (2009), 45; Hintze (2014b), 16-19, 21 with further bibliography on the chronology of linguistic developments in the *Avesta*.
[31] Hintze (2014b), 2-6.
[32] Macuch (2009), 126.
[33] Macuch (2009), 124-126 and Hintze (2014b), 2-6 summarise the debates on the chronology of the written *Avesta*.
[34] *Letter of Tansar*, translated in Boyce (1968), 37; *Denkard*, 4.16, 7.7.3; *Greater Bundahishn*, 33.14. Hintze (1998), 147-149, discusses these sources in greater detail.
[35] *Denkard*, 4.17-19.

provided by Manichaean texts and an inscription attributed to Kirdir (the high priest who served under three successive Sasanian kings, Shapur I, Hormizd I and Bahram II), which indicate that written forms of the *Avesta* were in circulation in the 3rd century AD.[36] Nevertheless, the *Denkard* informs us that an expanded and completed written version was compiled under Shapur II (AD 309-379); under Khosrow I (AD 531-575), the written *Avesta*, now canonised, was revised once more.[37] The original Sasanian manuscript of the *Avesta* is now lost, and the earliest surviving redaction of the extant scripture has been traced back to AD 1323.[38] The history of the *Avesta*'s transmission, from oral to written, demonstrates the layers of complexities that scholarship has to address when using the sacred texts as a source.[39]

The transmission of the *Avesta*, specifically in the Parthian period, has been comprehensively outlined by Hintze.[40] From the time of the earliest Gathic compositions around the 2nd millennium BC until its written codification in the late Sasanian period, the texts of the *Avesta* were principally recited orally and from memory, without the use of written aids. This has become evident to modern scholarship despite contradictory historical claims that state the *Avesta* was preserved in a transcribed form during the Achaemenid period (discussed above). Scholarship now generally takes the view that no such written tradition was dominant in Achaemenid religious practice, and episodes that describe how Alexander burnt the sacred books are merely part of a narrative that sought to parallel the perceived deterioration of the Mazdaean religion with the physical destruction wrought by Greek invaders and the lingering presence of their foreign gods in Iran.[41] The *Avesta* in its written form still retains a faithful oral

[36] Macuch (2009), 125 with bibliography on Henning (1942), 47; Sundermann (1981), 72; Skjærvø (1983), 276, 290 ff.
[37] *Denkard*, 4.19-24. See also Cantera (1999).
[38] Boyce (1984), 1.
[39] Hintze (2014b), 12-13.
[40] Hintze (1998), 147-161.
[41] Alexander's conquest and the subsequent influx of Greek deities into the Iranian sphere were considered by the Sasanian kings and priesthood to be detrimental to native religious practices. The Sasanian court became increasingly pressurised by rival monotheistic religions (namely Christianity, Judaism and Manichaeism), and in this context of religious competition, their religion was bolstered and emphasised by a more orthodox approach to religious ideology. Moreover, in order to establish their legitimacy as kings guided by Ahura Mazda, the Sasanians accused their defeated Arsacid

structure characterised by mnemonic devices (such as recurrent formulae, refrains and rhetorical episodes), suggesting that the sacred hymns were predominantly part of an oral culture right up to their codification in the Sasanian period.[42] Furthermore, the discovery of an Old Sogdian adaption of the *Ashem Vohu* prayer has validated the theory that the *Avesta* was communicated orally, and moreover, was recited in local dialects around the various regions of Iran.[43] Dialectal features of Arachosian, Sogdian and Parthian, for example, appear to have entered into Young Avestan passages as a result of this evolving oral tradition as it was diffused amongst Iranian worshippers.[44] Evidence for the presence of the Avestan religion in Parthia may be found in the place name Mozdūrān and the mountain range Kūh-e Mozdūrān, located in eastern Khorasan Province. Hintze, citing Humbach's analysis that these names may derive from Av. *mazdā- ahura-* and reflect an Old Avestan word sequence, states "The geographic name in Parthia could thus preserve an archaism and go back to Old Iranian times."[45]

Therefore, while the *Avesta* was still being transmitted through oral channels, it did not represent one single or linear tradition that stretched back

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predecessors of perpetuating the decline of the Zoroastrian religion, contaminating its doctrine with foreign gods, and leaving the remains of the sacred books largely in ruins. The *Letter of Tansar* claims "400 years had passed [under the Arsacids] in which the world was filled with wild and savage beasts and devils in human form, without religion or decency, learning or wisdom or shame. They were a people who brought nothing but desolation and corruption to the world; cities became deserts, and building were razed"; see translation in Boyce (1968), 67. This source also emphasises how the Sasanian Ardashir I (224-242 AD) successfully extinguished the multiple dynastic fires that had been established under the Arsacid kings and their fragmented empire, and left just one royal fire alight; see translation in Boyce (1968), 47.

[42] Macuch (2009), 119-120.

[43] Sims-Williams & Hamilton (1990), pl. 22, fr. 4. Hintze (1998), 155-157, with reference to N. Sims-Williams. Gershevitch (1976), 75-82 contends that this dialectal variation is proof of a Sogdian tradition that was independent of the Avestan tradition, but which shared a common Old Iranian, pre-Zarathustrian ancestor. Hintze, however, argues that the distinctive Sogdian inflextional endings and pronouns that are present in this version of the prayer suggest that the Sogdians received it in Avestan, which was then influenced by the local dialect. She concludes, "the specifically Sogdian dialectal characteristics found in this prayer show that the Avestan texts were adapted to the local dialect of the area where they were handed down not only in Arachosia/Drangiane and then Persis, but also in Sogdiana." See also Boyce & Grenet (1991), 123-124, who add, "Middle Sogdian phonetic characteristics also appear [in this version of the *Ashem Vohu* prayer], testifying to a long purely oral tradition. This brief text thus provides a valuable scrap of direct evidence for the existence of channels of Avestan transmission other than either the Persian or Arachosian."

[44] Hintze (1998), 154, with note 48.

[45] Hintze (1998), 156.

to the time of the prophet Zarathustra, but rather was the product of more than a millennium of recited ceremonies and prayers across a diverse body of Iranian communities. When the Sasanian kings came to power in Persis, established a strongly centralised political empire with an increasingly powerful priesthood, and decided to set these sacred hymns into a cemented form, it was one branch of this rich religious tradition that became the codified written version.[46] The *Avesta*, as we know it today, is primarily a product of the Persid Zoroastrian tradition from the heartland of the Sasanian Empire. The region of Persis was historically a major centre of transmission since the time of the Achaemenid kings in the 6th-4th centuries BC, and this was continued under the local Persid rulers, who struck images of the king worshipping in front of a fire holder on their coinage from the 1st century BC.[47] The fact that it is the Sasanian period Persid tradition that has been inherited from the ancient world makes these sacred texts a complex secondary source for studying the earlier Parthian period. The Arsacid kings, who ruled for almost half a millennium before the rise of the Sasanian dynasty, descended from one of the north-eastern Iranian tribes. Scholarship today recognises that there were most likely other centres of religious tradition outside of Persis, with Sistan in particular being highlighted. Hintze notes, "The Avesta provides a detailed description of the geography of Sistan in south-east Iran as well as referring to important eschatological events scheduled to take place at Lake Hamun. Indeed, certain phonetic features which do not comply with Avestan sound laws are explained by Hoffmann as having entered the language of the Avesta from the dialect of that region, probably from the otherwise unknown Arachotic dialect. The philological evidence is supported by the Zoroastrian tradition, which reports Sistan as one of its strongholds."[48]

Arachosia is mentioned in secondary sources from the Graeco-Roman and Chinese spheres as part of the Parthian Empire's eastern border region. Written sometime between the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, Isidore of

[46] Nyberg (1938), 471; Boyce (1975a) [1996], 20; Hintze (1998), 158.
[47] Earlier coinage of the Persid kings of the mid-3rd century BC show the king worshipping in front of a building that may represent a fire temple; see pp. 188-189.
[48] Hintze (1998), 154 with references, in particular Hoffmann & Narten (1989), 80.

Charax's *Parthian Stations* follows the overland trade route across Parthia that ended at Arachosia, known as "White India" amongst the Parthians - probably in reference to ivory sourced from here.[49] Prestigious items that were carved in ivory and discovered in the storerooms at Parthian Nisa (such as the famous rhytons and throne/furniture legs) may indicate exchanges of ideas and traditions, as well as goods, between these regions.[50] As such, centres of transmission outside of Persis may well have had a greater influence on the religion of the Parthian kings, whose relationship to Persis was exercised indirectly through the appointment of vassal kings. Where other major centres of tradition were located is difficult to say; Isidore of Charax mentions an everlasting royal fire that was established for Arsaces I at the site of Assak and that was carefully guarded on the road between Hyrcania and Parthia.[51] Archaeological evidence further indicates traces of fire temple structures, notably in the northern and eastern reaches of the Parthian Empire (see below). Many centuries later, the *Letter of Tansar* claimed that Ardashir I extinguished the multiple fires that had been established under the Arsacids, leaving just one royal fire alight at the centre of his own empire in Persis.[52] This was, of course, the start of the movement towards centralising the Zoroastrian religion at the Sasanians' stronghold in southern Iran.

When considering the different religious nuances that the Arsacid kings incorporated into their ideology and material culture, it is important to keep in mind the notion of orality and fluidity in the transmission of the Avesta, and to treat the text that has survived into modern times not as a static source of evidence, but one that was historically open to local tradition, expression and interpretation. The framework below outlines how the different aspects of the *Avesta* can be applied to a study of Parthian religious ideology. The coinage consisting of higher value and widely circulating silver denominations, as well as lower value local bronze issues, may represent significant religious themes

[49] Isidore of Charax, §19. The trade routes as described in the Chinese sources also pass through *Wuyishanli* or Arachosia; see pp. 97-98, 106-107 below on Parthian geography.
[50] The ivory objects from Old Nisa are discussed further below in relation to the ivory workshops in Bactria; see pp. 96, 99-100, 121-122.
[51] Isidore of Charax, §11.
[52] Translation in Boyce (1968), 47.

across two different spheres; namely an overarching royal sphere with priestly contact, and a localised sphere influenced by the king's subjects and laity.

Fire Ritual – The Yasna

The *Yasna* ceremony, which culminates in the ritual transformation of the fire, was practiced daily by priests within the sacred fire temple (*atroshan*). At the present time, archaeologists have discovered traces of fire temple structures that are contemporary with the Parthian period at Mele Hairam in south-western Turkmenistan; at the Bactrian site of Takht-i Sangin in northern Afghanistan; possibly at Surkh Kotal, also in Bactria; at Kuh-e Khwajeh in Sistan; at Shahr-e Qumis or ancient Hecatompylos in western Khorasan; and possibly at Susa in Khuzestan and Persepolis in Fars (known as the *frataraka* temple).[53] Fire temple sites further afield have also been uncovered in Chorasmia (modern Uzbekistan), as well as at sites along the Uzboy River (modern central Turkmenistan).[54] In the ostraca records from the Parthian citadel of Nisa (near modern Ashgabat, Turkmenistan), the name of a priestly official has been preserved as *āturšpat* 'priest of the fire temple'.[55] On silver coinage attributed to the kings of Persis from the 1st century BC, the ruler is shown on the reverse participating in a pious scene, holding a *barsom* and standing in worshipping pose before a fire holder.[56] This image echoes a tradition that can be seen in the Achaemenid royal tomb reliefs at Naqsh-i Rustam, whereby the Persian king is shown standing before a fire holder and gesturing towards the iconic winged figure of the Mazdaean religion. The geographical account of Isidore of Charax suggests that Arsacid kings were also involved in rituals carried out before a sacred fire. The author states that an ever-burning flame was established at the

[53] Yamamoto (1979), 40 ff.; Boyce (1975b); *ibid*. (1987c) [2011]; Betts & Yagodin (2007), 449-451. Garrison (1999) [2012] provides a comprehensive summary of these sites with further bibliography. No fire temple remains dating to the Achaemenid period have yet been uncovered, though sacred fires were depicted in the art and iconography of the period, and are mentioned in some western sources; Yamamoto (1979); Genito (1982); *ibid*. (1987); Stronach (1985); Garrison (1999) [2012].

[54] See Betts & Yagodin (2007), 437 for further bibliography; Minardi & Khozhaniyazov (2011) [2015]. The Chorasmian archaeological sites that show evidence of fire temples include the Akchakhan-kala monumental complex, Tash-k'irman Tepe, Kyzy-kala, Janbas-kala and Gyaur-kala. In the Uzboy Basin, the site of Ichanl'i-depe has also been excavated.

[55] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 2580 II.

[56] Klose & Müseler (2008), 56 ff., types under 4/4-4/22.

site of Assak where Arsaces was first proclaimed king.[57] The scattered evidence for fire temples and holders across archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and literary sources indicates that fire played a central role in priestly ritual over many centuries. These various sources, moreover, indicate a strong connection between the sacred flames and Iranian kingship.

During the recitation of the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, Ahura Mazda and both his 'spiritual' creations (the *Amesha Spentas*) and 'material' creations (cattle, waters, plants, stars, etc.) are praised. Heavenly fire (*atar*), whose light is described as the most beautiful manifestation of Ahura Mazda, is entreated to come down to the earthly worshippers, and the ceremonial fire is thus transformed into the *yazata* Atar (Y. 36). The sacred and unpolluted fire allows the community of worshippers to approach Ahura Mazda, and to be guided by his Truth or Righteousness (*asha*), his good thoughts, his good words and his good deeds (YH. 36.4). On the sacred aura of divine light, Rose states: "Each recited prayer to Ahura Mazda is made facing a source of illumination of some kind, particularly fire or the sun", and in "poetic form" this represents the continuation of the cosmic order which sees the sun and its life-giving light rise every day.[58] The metaphor is embedded in the ritual itself; the worshippers' reverence towards Ahura Mazda guides them towards *asha*, bringing peace, order and prosperity to the community, and driving out the Lie (*druj*) from their midst.

Fire (*Atar*) is, furthermore, strongly associated with the *yazata* Mithra, particularly with regard to the concept of kingship and royal conduct. These qualities are manifested strongly in the devotional *Yashts*, composed over subsequent centuries as the religion expanded into the imperial sphere under the Achaemenids.[59] Mithra presides over contracts, alliances and oaths sworn

[57] Isidore of Charax, §11.

[58] Rose (2011), 16-17. Rose references Y. 43.16 to emphasise the importance of life-giving light in the *Gathas*. See Hinzte's (2009), 9 translation, "… May truth be corporeal, strong through vitality. May right-mindedness be in the kingdom which sees the sun…"

[59] Notably, Mithra (sometimes with Anahita) was invoked in inscriptions attributed to the Achaemenid kings Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC) and Artaxerxes III (358-338). See Gershevitch (1959)

before a sacred fire, overseeing the fulfilment of these promises (Yt. 10.3.).[60] Moreover, the *yazata* protects the divine glory (*khvarnah*) that is bestowed onto righteous kings who satisfy their oaths and royal duties (Yt. 10.108; Yt. 19.35). In the sensational description of Mithra in the *Yasht*, fire and divine glory are said to accompany him in his heavily armed chariot that flies across the Iranian provinces as he deals blows to *daevas* and enemies who have broken their contracts through falsehood and been guided by *druj* (Yt. 10.127-133). In the *Yasna*, these qualities are intimated in the epithets attached to the *yazata*, and repeated throughout the ritual: Mithra "of the thousand ears, and of the myriad eyes" (Y. 1.3), all-hearing and ever-watchful over those who have entered into contracts and oaths; and Mithra "governor of all the provinces" (Y. 2.11), overseeing the Iranian lands as a regal overlord should rule with *asha*.[61] Although Mithra is not invoked by name during the climactic transformation of the fire in the *Yasna Haptanghaiti*, the *yazata* is named second to Ahura Mazda across other chapters of the *Yasna*: "I announce [and] carry out [this yasna] for the two, for Ahura and Mithra, the lofty, and the everlasting, and the *asha*-sanctified" (Y. 1.11); "… to Ahura and to Mithra, the lofty, and imperishable, the holy two" (Y. 4.16).

Mithra's function in the fortune and glory of the Arsacid kings has been noted in some scholarship;[62] however, the coin evidence has remained largely

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[1967], 18-24 on the solicitation of these *yazatas* as a key development in Achaemenid religious thinking.

[60] The *Yasht* dedicated to the divine Judge, Rashnu, describes the ordeal by fire – a trial in which a subject has to pass through fire to verify their sworn statement; if they speak the truth, the divine world will protect the subject from the flames' harm (Yt. 12.5). This ordeal, moreover, extends to the celestial fire that is the sun. The Zoroastrian trial by fire is widely attested in later Persian religious and epic literature; see Boyce (1975a) [1996], 28-29, 35-36; *ibid*. (1975c), 70-72; *ibid*. (1987a) [2011].

[61] See also Yt. 10.7, 44-46 on Mithra as ever-watchful and all-seeing of the world.

[62] Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 422-423; *ibid*. (2012a), 76; *ibid*. (2016), 183; Sinisi (2014), 35. Mithraic iconography has been more extensively associated with the kings of Pontus and Commagene to the west of Parthia, and with the Kushans to the east due to the nature of the surviving material culture. For general discussion, see Grenet (2006) [2006] with further bibliography; Shenkar (2015), 102-114; Adrych, *et al.* (2017). For more specific discussions on Mithra in Pontus, see Blawatsky & Kochelenko (1966); Summerer (1995); Saprykin (2009); Soudavar (2014), 291. On Commagene, see Dörner (1978); Waldmann (1991); Boyce & Grenet (1991), 316-351; Wagner (2000). On Graeco-Bactria and the Kushans, see Rosenfield (1967), 69 ff.; Grenet (1991); Curtis, V.S. (2012a), 72, specifically in connection with the *khvarnah*; Bracey (2012); Sinisi (2015), 212-213.

understudied in examinations of this *yazata* and his role in Parthian religious ideology.

Devotional Hymns – The Yashts

The *Yashts* represent a collection of devotional hymns that could be performed by both priesthood and laity.[63] These hymns were dedicated to the *yazatas* that support Ahura Mazda, and describe their diverse spheres of power, their various incarnations, and other ample details. The texts form an importance source of information about individual devotional cults that were practiced by Mazda-worshipping communities.

The worship of individual *yazatas* during the Parthian period is evident from the Parthian terms *bagin* and *āyazan*, the first designating an image shrine that was dedicated to a particular deity, and the latter a 'sanctuary' (Old Persian *āyadana*).[64] This is attested, for example, on the inscribed bronze statue of Herakles from Messene that, according to the Parthian version of the inscription, was placed in the *bagin* of Tir (a Mesopotamian deity conflated with the Iranian Tishtrya) at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.[65] Two sanctuary sites are also attested in the inscribed potshard fragments (ostraca) from Nisa, one in the name of *Tīrenāk* 'Belonging to Tir' and the second known as *Nanēstāwakān* 'of the worship of Nana'.[66]

Furthermore, onomastic evidence preserved in the ostraca from Nisa demonstrates that many Iranians were named after particular *yazatas*. The most frequently attested names contain as a compound *Mihr* 'Mithra', and relate to this divine being as a creator, protector, holder of *farn* (*khvarnah*), and

[63] Hintze (2009), 2; *ibid*. (2014a) [2014].
[64] Boyce (1975b) discusses the emergence of the fire temple in opposition to individual image cults that flourished between the 4th century BC and the iconoclastic movement of the Sasanian kings from the 3rd century AD. The role of the Greek pantheon in ancient Iran from 330 BC has been viewed as an influencing factor in the development of image shrines. See also Boyce (1982), 225; Rose (2011), 49-51, 80-84; Stewart & Mistree (2013), 202.
[65] Hackl *et a*l. (2010), 569-571, III.2.6. The inscription on this statue is dated to AD 151.
[66] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), nos. 1636, 1637, 1638, 1639, 2573.

companion to the divine Rashnu and Tir amongst others.[67] Names that derive from Mithra were also held by military nobility who feature in the Babylonian accounts, as well as men involved in a land contract that was found in Avroman (Iranian Kurdistan).[68] In addition, the Nisa ostraca attest to the use of Avestan month and day names in this city - that is, according to Rose, "to the traditional religious almanac, rather than the Seleucid calendar" that had been used by the former ruling dynasty.[69]

Finally, coin iconography provided another medium through which the worship of individual *yazatas* could be expressed – most notably in Kushan coin imagery from the 1st century AD onwards, but arguably also underlying Parthian period coin iconography.[70] For example, invoked in *Yasht* 19, the *khvarnah* played an important role in Parthian imagery. This divine, glorious aura that was bestowed by Ahura Mazda and his *yazatas* gave legitimacy and power to kings. The concept of the Iranian *khvarnah* is where the political and religious spheres meet, converging on the Iranian king who rules at the apex of the empire according to the will of the divine world. The Achaemenid kings emphasised this relationship with the supreme deity in their inscriptions as well as in their monumental rock reliefs. At Bisotun, Darius I (522-486 BC) proclaimed, "Ahuramazda bestowed the kingdom upon me; Ahuramazda bore

[67] For example, *Mihrbarzan* 'Mithra exalting', *Mihrfarn* 'Glory of Mithra', *Rašnmihr* 'Rashnu-Mithra', Tīr(i)mihrak 'Tir-Mithra', and Mihrxšahr 'Possessed by Mithra'; Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), 197; Schmitt (2016), 129-142, 216-217, nos. 280-305, 517. In addition to these personal names are those of the fortress itself, known as Mithradātkirt 'Fortress of Mithradates', the estate Mithradātkan that principally supplied the fortress' commander-in-chief, and the vineyards Mihrēnak, and Mihrēnān; Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), 197. Other theophoric names attested in the Nisa ostraca include references to Ahura Mazda (e.g. *Ahurmazddāt* 'Given by Ahura Mazda'), Sraosha (e.g. *Srōšdātak* 'Given by Sraosha'), Verethragna (e.g. *Warhragnbōžan* 'Verethragna invigorating'), Mah (e.g. *Māhčihr* 'from the seed of Mah'), and the Amesha Spenta Vohu Manah (e.g. *Wahman* 'Good Purpose'); see Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), e.g. nos. 306, 661, 1418a, 1453, 1513.

[68] For example, *Μειριδάτης* and *Μιραδάτης* in Avroman I.A.29, I.B.31, II.A.12, II.B.17, in Minns (1915), 28-32; *Mitradātâ*, *Mitrātu* and *Raznumitra* with references to the *Astronomical Diaries* in Shayegan (2011), 224, table 10.

[69] Rose (2011), 73.

[70] For example, the Kushan Pharro/Farnah (*Khvarnah*) who appears on coins of Kanishka I on the final phase of his gold coinage, and throughout his bronze coinage; Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), D.G1-iii 1d (13a). For a comprehensive list of deities found on Kushan coins, the frequency of their appearance, and discussion on their iconography - particularly during the reigns of Kanishka I (c. AD 127-150) and Huvishka (AD 140-180); see Rosenfield (1967), 69 ff.; Bracey (2012), 203, table 2; Jongeward & Cribb (2015), 268, table 4. The debate on whether the Avestan *yazatas* can be identified in Parthian coin iconography is discussed is further detail below, pp. 68 ff.

me aid until I got possession of this kingdom; by the favour of Ahuramzada I hold this kingdom."[71] In the accompanying relief, Darius I stands victorious with his royal bow before a line of defeated and chained rebels from across his empire; the king raises his hand to gesture towards the winged figure hovering above the scene. This winged figure, generally interpreted as Ahura Mazda or the *khvarnah* itself, returns the gesture towards the victorious king and offers a kingship ring with his other hand.[72] The winged figure has been depicted in the image of the king himself. Centuries later, when the Sasanian Ardashir I (AD 224-242) commissioned his investiture relief at Naqsh-i Rustam in Persis, the king was shown mounted on a horse, trampling his Arsacid adversary, and reaching out to a second mounted figure opposite him. Between them they hold a kingship ring – Ardashir I has been victorious in seizing the *khvarnah* from his Arsacid opponent. The second mounted figure is identified in the accompanying inscriptions as Ahura Mazda, fashioned in the likeness of Ardashir I, with his mount trampling Angra Mainyu.[73] The trilingual inscription engraved into Ardashir I's horse reads, "This is the image of his Zoroastrian Majesty Ardashir, King of Kings from Iran, whose appearance derives from the gods, the son of his majesty, King Papak."[74] In later sources, the Sasanian king Ardashir I is quoted as saying, "For Church and State were born of the one womb, joined together and never to be sundered."[75]

The Arsacid kings did not commission monumental rock reliefs to the same extent as their Achaemenid predecessors and their Sasanian successors, who used this medium to display their special relationship to the divine. The first instance of an investiture scene in Parthian material culture appears on coinage in the mid-1st century BC, during a period of intense dynastic turmoil

[71] DB I §9, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 119.
[72] Luschey (1968), pl. X. See Boyce's (1982), 38, 94-97 outline of the arguments concerning the identity of the Achaemenid winged figure, and further discussion on p. 179 below.
[73] Schmidt (1970), 121 ff., pls. 80 ff.; Back (1978), 282.
[74] Translation in Back (1978), 281; see also Overlaet (2011).
[75] From the *Letter of Tansar*, translated by Boyce (1968), 33-34. The 10th century Arab historian Mas'udi similarly phrases this notion as follows, "Religion and kingship are two brothers, and neither can dispense without the other. Religion is the foundation of kingship and kingship protects religion"; and Tha'alibi (10th-11th century), "Kingship preserves itself through religion"; Choksy (1988).

known as the "Dark Age". Seleucian tetradrachms of Phraates III (c. 70-57 BC) depict the king enthroned and holding an eagle and sceptre on the reverse. The goddess Tyche stands behind him, placing a diadem on his head.[76] Tetradrachms struck by Phraates III's son and murderer, Mithradates IV (c. 57-54 BC), show an enthroned king holding a royal bow on the reverse, while a winged Nike crowns him with a diadem.[77] Portraits on the obverse of some drachms also depicted the Arsacid kings receiving the royal diadem: on coins of Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC) and Pacorus I (c. 39 BC), a winged Nike flies behind the king's bust with a diadem in her outstretched hand; and on coins of Phraates IV (c. 38-2 BC), an eagle flies behind the king's bust with the diadem in its beak.[78] In the devotional hymns, the *khvarnah* appears alongside various divine beings, and is sought for by a host of heroes and kings. The many contexts in which the *khvarnah* appears demonstrate that there were various traditions concerning the divine glory beyond its creation and bestowing by Ahura Mazda, as outlined in the rock reliefs of the Achaemenids and Sasanians. The *khvarnah* flies away from King Yima in the shape of the Varegna bird (Yt. 19-34-38); it soars alongside fire and is bestowed by Mithra from his chariot (Yt. 10.16); it rushes together with Verethragna in the shape of the Wind (Yt. 14.2); it reaches the heavenly Vouru-kasha Sea to be protected by Apam Napat of the Waters (Yt. 8.34, Yt. 13.65, Yt. 19.51); and it is accompanied by Ashi, who bestows well-being to her worshippers (Yt. 19.54). The *khvarnah* as it appears in the devotional *Yashts* can examined more thoroughly in relation to Arsacid political and religious ideology (see Chapters Two and Three).

The battles of various kings and warriors in the *Yashts* present an intriguing glimpse into Iranian myth and legend. The presence of these heroic figures in the great epic poems (which were transmitted orally under the Arsacid kings until their written compilation some centuries later – see below) demonstrates their important role in Iranian culture and ideology. In the hymn to Tishtrya, the *yazata*'s swift flight is compared to that of the arrow shot by

[76] S39.1.
[77] S41.1; known as Mithradates III in Sellwood (1980).
[78] S42, S49.1, S52.10 ff., S53.3 ff., S54.7 ff. See also Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 62; *ibid.* (2000), 25; *ibid.* (2007), 15; *ibid*. (2012a), 71; Sinisi (2014), 15-17.

Erekhsha to demarcate the boundary between Iran and Turan (Yt. 8.6 & 8.37). In the *Shahnameh* epic, this famed Iranian hero, known by the name Kay Arash, is noted as an ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty.[79] This link between the Arsacid dynasty and the legendary hero is further detailed in Chapter 3 in connection with the seated Parthian archer that is depicted on silver coinage. The weapons depicted on Parthian coinage (particularly the bronzes issues) are also reminiscent of those wielded by legendary heroes and divine beings alike. Mithra and Verethragna use the bow and club against the wicked *daevas*, while warriors seek boons from these *yazatas*, hoping that victory-bringing weapons will be delivered to them (see Chapter Four).

[79] Translation in Davis (2007), 141, 529.

4. Later Iranian Literature

Several Iranian works composed in the 10th-14th centuries, but which nevertheless have their roots in ancient oral poetry, offer enlightening contextual evidence for the Parthian period. These works are principally the short Middle Persian text of the *Ayadgar-i Zareran* (*Memoir of Zarir*) that celebrates a battle that took place in the early history of Zoroastrianism; Gorgani's romance, *Vis and Ramin*; as well as legends from the heroic age in Ferdowsi's Persian epic, the *Shahnameh.*[80] Though these works inevitably contain elements that were drawn from the time of their authors to suit contemporary audiences, linguistic evidence as well as the geographic settings and personal names indicate that these narratives were originally composed in a poetic tradition stretching back to the Parthian period.[81] These texts, as they have survived today, echo the epic stories that were recited in the residences of the Parthian kings and the elite family clans.[82]

From the *Ayadgar-i Zareran,* Boyce has highlighted several passages which show a high concentration of Parthian or archaic elements preserved in their narratives, including "par. 92, Bastwar's incantation over the arrow with which he is to shoot Wīdrafsh; par. 41, an oath-taking formula [that invokes Ahura Mazda and Druvaspa 'of Sound Horses']; and pars. 84-87, Bastwar's elegy for this father."[83] These passages reference the important skills of archery and riding that distinguished the Parthian royalty and warriors.

The narrative in *Vis and Ramin* takes place between two ruling houses based in cities that were once Parthian strongholds: Marv (Margiana) in the north-east and Mah (Ecbatana) in the north-west of Iran.[84] Minorsky has

[80] Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* was completed in AD 1010 and is known today from the earliest surviving manuscripts of the 13th and 14th centuries. In his written compilation, Ferdowsi relied on both oral sources and written transmissions, including various sources written in Middle Persian (such as the late Sasanian *Book of Kings*), 8th century Arabic translations, and the early Persian compositions of Abu Mansur and Daqiqi; see Curtis, V.S. (1993a), 29; Davis (2007), xviii-xx.
[81] Minorsky (1946), 745; Boyce (1987b) [2012]; Davis (2005).
[82] Boyce (1957), 12; Curtis, V.S. (1998b).
[83] Boyce (1987b) [2012].
[84] Minorsky (1946), 757.

suggested that King Mōbad of Marv is a scion of the Arsacid family branch founded by Gotarzes II, and represents a "[champion] of the Arsacid homelands against the westernised kings brought up in Media, Mesopotamia, or even Rome."[85] It is further proposed that the house of Mah is "that of the Karenids [Karen], one of the seven noble families under the Arsacids."[86] In the historical conflict between Gotarzes II (c. AD 40-51) and his brother Vardanes I (c. AD 40-45), Gotarzes II gained the support of the Dahae tribes to the north-east of the Parthian border and established a minor Arsacid kingdom in Margiana.[87] Relations between the Arsacid kings, their tribal ancestors, and their western neighbours are considered in greater detail in this thesis, particularly during the consolidation of the Parthian Empire on both eastern and western fronts under the reign of Mithradates II. Following the death of this king, the Parthian Empire was plunged into a "Dark Age" and became fractured by internal rivalries that gave rise to the geopolitical factions that are reminiscent of the world of *Vis and Ramin*.

Excerpts from the heroic age in the *Shahnameh* are similarly evocative of the Parthian period. In the words of Davis: "the homeland of the *Shahnameh,* at least until the advent of the Sasanians, is Khorasan [north-east of Iran, including ancient Hyrcania, Parthia and Margiana]… and the material utilised in the earlier sections of the poem derives from the legends of this area."[88] The use of the epithet *Pahlavan/Pahlavani* (understood as 'hero'/'heroic', but originally meaning 'Parthian') to describe characters, costume and regalia reflects the strong Parthian culture of this period.[89] However, while the heroic section of the *Shahnameh* has inherited various Parthian elements, the later historical section (more heavily influenced by Sasanian king lists) shortens the almost five hundred year rule of the Arsacids to a mere few verses.[90]

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[85] Minorsky (1947), 25, 31. The Romanised Parthian kings that Minorsky alludes to are Vonones I (c. AD 8-12) and Tiridates II (c. AD 35-38). These kings were the descendants of Phraates IV, and had been sent to Rome as hostages as part of the treaty made with Augustus in 20 BC.
[86] Minorsky (1947), 31.
[87] Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.3.4; Tacitus *Annals*, 11.9-10.
[88] Davis (2007), xx.
[89] Lazard (1972); Melikian-Chirvani (1998), 186-190. Notably, the meaning of the dynastic name Arsaces/Arshak has a similar meaning of 'Ruling over Heroes'; see p. 138 below.
[90] Davis (2007), xxiv.

One of the *Shahnameh*'s chief heroes, the *Jahan Pahlavan* 'World Hero' Rostam, is a local king ruling in Sistan. Bivar has paralleled Rostam's deeds to those of the Parthian general Surena, a member of the noble House of Suren from eastern Iran and a proven hero at the Battle of Carrhae, in which the Roman general Crassus was defeated in 53 BC.[91] Melikian-Chirvani has presented an opposing theory, arguing that the hero who is sometimes refered to as *Rostam-e Sagzi* 'Rostam of Sistan' should be translated with the different nuance as 'Rostam of Scythia'.[92] The scholar argues that Rostam's heritage derives from the myth of Scythes 'the Scythian', a descendant of Herakles and founder of the Scythian royal house.[93] The seven trials undertaken by Rostam in the *Shahnameh* share a thematic model with the twelve labours of the Greek hero Herakles, and is suggestive of a cultural osmosis between the Iranian and Hellenistic worlds.[94] Further discussion on the hero tradition may benefit our understanding of Arsacid mythology and ideology, especially in light of the Herakleian iconography on Parthian bronze coinage (see Chapter Four).

Rostam's trials stand out for their emphasis on the vanquishing of ferocious beasts, demons and monsters associated with *Druj*, the 'Lie'. Rostam's victories replace these sources of evil with A*sha* ('Truth' or 'Righteousness') - a quality repeated throughout the seven episodes along with the hero's awe of Ahura Mazda; for example, "You'll find out what one mammoth man can do against their king's demonic retinue; protected by the world Creator's will,

[91] Bivar (1983), 51. See Plutarch's account of Surena in *Crassus*, 21.6: "Surena was no ordinary man, but in wealth, birth and esteem, he was second to the king, while in strength and cleverness he was first amongst the Parthians, with, moreover, no equal to his body's greatness and beauty […]"

[92] Meliki-Chirvani (1998), 171 also highlights the link between Sistan and the Scythians/Sakas whom the province owes its name to, "Sakastān < Saiastān < Sīstān". Saka tribes emigrated from their homeland towards this region during the Parthian period.

[93] Melikian-Chirvani (1998). See note 778 below on the myth of Scythes.

[94] The similarities extend to the appearance of the hero Rostam, who wears a feline skin in a similar fashion to the Greek Herakles, and wields a powerful mace similar to Herakles' famed club; Maguire (1974), 138; Melikian-Chirvani (1998), 173-174. Melikian-Chirvani's discussion on Rostam's likeness to the Greek Herakles presents three possibilities regarding the fusion of these legendary heroes; in summary: 1) Was Rostam a Scythian adaption of a Greek myth, gradually transforming into a Parthian hero? 2) Did two separate but similar Greek and Scythian mythological hero-traditions exist which allowed the Scythian hero to later absorb Hellenistic credentials? 3) Was Herakles gradually Iranised and later merged with the Sagzi Rostam?; Meliki-Chirvani (1998), 192.

helped by my sword and arrows and my skill."[95] Rose has commented that the Iranian epics exemplify Ahura Mazda's triumph over evil in the form of earthly heroes battling enemies.[96] The heroic section of the *Shahnameh* provides important perspectives on the union of imperial power and divine legitimacy, especially in relation to attaining the royal *khvarnah*. The *Shahnameh* particularly brings to light changing notions of kingship, contrasting a tradition where the legitimate and rightful king wins his position through the "acclamation of his peers" and the nobility, to one where the king is elevated to his position by the "sanction of God" and is responsible as "God's representative on earth."[97] While Davis attributes the first tradition of kingship to steppe culture and the latter to the Sasanian period, it is interesting to compare Strabo's report on the laws of kingship in Parthia, where a ruler is chosen by a council consisting of both kinsmen and Magi.[98] Various leitmotifs in the heroic stories of the *Shahnameh* can be compared to Parthian period iconography; for example the illuminating crown as a symbol of royal power echoes the bejewelled tall tiara of Mithradates II that was decorated with a central star or solar motif (see Chapter Two).[99]

Though these epic narratives were transcribed into writing in later centuries and have undoubtedly been transformed since the time of the Parthians, they contain important subject matter that may elucidate on certain aspects of Parthian political and religious life. Parthian influences that can be gleaned from these epics resonate with religious ideas inherent in the Avestan texts, as well as with the iconography of the extensive primary coin evidence. The Parthian influences that have been highlighted in the epics raise interesting questions on the nature of religion during this period, on the politics between

[95] Translation in Davis (2007), 159.
[96] Rose (2011), 76.
[97] Davis (2007), xxiii.
[98] Strabo, 11.9.3.
[99] For example, "[...] since the sun draws its light from my crown […]"; translated in Davis (2007), 176. Curtis, V.S. (2001), 309-310 identifies the tall tiara, along with the royal belt and diadem, as defining items in the royal insignia. These objects were depicted extensively in Parthian art to demarcate the king, and in the *Shahnameh*, he distributes these items to his highest-ranking officials and vassal rulers. See also Errington & Curtis, V.S. (2007), 49.

ruling houses across the empire, and on the court life and warrior code of the Iranian kings.

5. Epigraphic and Archaeological Sources

Epigraphy

Several sources of primary written evidence have survived from the Parthian world in fragments, revealing glimpses into the affairs of rulers and communities living under the Arsacid Empire. In the east of the Parthian Empire, a group of c. 2,750 inscribed potshard fragments (ostraca) were excavated in the 1930s at the citadel fortress of Nisa in southern Turkmenistan.[100] These documents, etched in ink, were composed in the native Parthian language and principally record the collection and distribution of wine from local vineyards. They provide a broad list of Iranian personal names and names of nearby estates, as well as occasional references to figures such as a *magus* by the name of *Mihrdāt*, an *āturšpat* 'priest of the fire temple', and a *marzpān* 'margrave'.[101] In addition, Avestan month and day names were used in these records, alongside the year according to the Arsacid Era.[102] The greater part of these ostraca can be dated to the 1st centuries BC and AD.

In the west of the Parthian Empire, cuneiform tablets from Babylon, specifically the *Astronomical Diaries* and the *Babylonian Chronicles*, document the rise and fall of kings and rebels in Mesopotamia, as well as fluctuating commodity prices, astrological observances and ominous phenomena that were

[100] These documents have been transcribed and translated in Diakonoff & Livshits (2001).
[101] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), nos. 1624, 1787, 2301, 2303, 2577, 2675, 2580 II.
[102] The Arsacid Era began in the year 248/247 BC, though the significance of this date remains unclear. It is presumed to have marked either the election of Arsaces I as leader of the Parni tribe, or the successful Parni invasion of the Parthian satrapy, in which the sitting satrap Andragoras was overthrown; Shahbazi (1986b) [2016]. The Seleucid Era goes back to 312/311 BC, the year in which Seleucus I returned from exile in Ptolemaic Egypt to re-conquer Babylon, thus marking the foundation of the Seleucid dynasty. Using the vernal equinox as the start of the new year (according to Babylonian tradition, 1 Nisanu = 14 April), the Seleucid and Arsacid eras began in April 311 BC and 247 BC respectively. The Macedonian new year (starting in the month of Dios = October) was used principally in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and in Greek-language inscriptions, and preceded the Babylonian new year. Thus, the Seleucid and Arsacid eras, according to the Macedonian new year cycle, began in October 312 BC and 248 BC respectively.

perceived in the region.[103] During the Parthian period, the Babylonian scribes used the Arsacid Era of the ruling dynasty to date the tablets, as well as the Seleucid Era of the former kings, which was still used in the region by Greek communities, particularly at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (known as the "city of kingship" in the tablets). The Mesopotamian literary tradition stretched back to the 3rd millennium BC and continued until the final tablets were written in the 1st century BC during the Parthian period.[104] The *Archive of Raḫimesu*, a smaller group of 29 tablets concerning the financial administration of the temples in Babylon, is dated to the years 95/94-94/93 BC, when Mithradates II was king.[105]

In south-western Iran, a small collection of fragmented Greek lapidary inscriptions were unearthed at Susa and date to the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. These texts deal with matters relating to civic life in Susa, such as the honouring of victors in the sacred games and the manumission of slaves.[106]

A small number of individual inscriptions from the Parthian period have also survived. Those that date to the time of Mithradates II include the largely damaged monumental rock inscription from Bisotun in western Iran, written in Greek and attributed to Mithradates II.[107] The relief depicts Mithradates II in front of four dignitaries; today however, it is barely visible as a result of a newer inscription that was overlaid in 1684 by a Safavid local governor. The relief and its inscription were reconstructed by Herzfeld from a drawing produced by the French traveller Grelot in 1673. Herzfeld could only identify three out of the

[103] Shayegan (2011), 'Appendix I' provides a chronological table of the published cuneiform documents relating to the Arsacids with reference to Sachs & Hunger (1996) *Astronomical Diaries and Related Texts from Babylonia*.
[104] The literary tradition stretches back to the Sumerian period in the third millennium BC, and continued through periods dominated by the Neo-Assyrians (911–620 BC), the Neo-Babylonians (620-539 BC), the Achaemenids (539-333 BC), the Macedonians under Alexander (333-323 BC), the Seleucids (323-141 BC), and from c. 141 BC, finally the Arsacids.
[105] The *Archive of Raḫimesu* has been published and analysed by Spek (1998) and Hackl (2016).
[106] Potts (1999), 360-371.
[107] Herzfeld (1920), 36; Vanden Berghe (1983), 119.

four dignitaries' names in the fragmented inscription: Gotarzes the 'Satrap of Satraps', Kophasates, and Mithrates.[108]

A clay tablet from Babylon, written in Greek and dated to 110/109 BC, lists the winners of that year's athletic games that took place in the city's Greek gymnasium.[109] Moreover, this tablet unusually attached the epithet 'Philhellene' to Mithradates II name; on the coinage, in contrast, this epithet was largely omitted from the legend.

A bilingual Greek and Parthian contract that was recorded on a parchment found in 1909 in a cave in Avroman (modern Iranian Kurdistan) dates to 88/87 BC, towards the beginning of Gotarzes I's reign.[110] This text served as a contract for the sale of a vineyard. In the preamble, it is stated that the reigning king was married to a daughter of Tigranes II, the Armenian king who had been held captive at the Parthian court under Mithradates II. This contract was found with two others, one dating to 22/21 BC, and the second dating to AD 53.

From beyond the borders of the Parthian Empire, a small number of inscriptions relating to the Parthian world have come to light. For example, from a kurgan excavated in 1989 near the modern city of Isakovka (Omsk region, western Siberia), three vessels were found; one was inscribed with a Parthian inscription, and two with Chorasmian inscriptions.[111] Olbrycht has dated these inscriptions to the 2nd or 1st century BC, are argues that they were part of a diplomatic exchange between kings in Parthia and Chorasmia.[112]

[108] Herzfeld (1920), 39. While the Gotarzes depicted in the relief is most likely Mithradates II's son and successor, Gotarzes I (c. 91-87 BC), Kophasates has been identified with the satrap Kōfzād mentioned in the Nisa ostraca between 85-80 BC, and Mithrates with the Chief of Troops Mitrātu mentioned in the Astronomical Diaries between 91-82 BC; see Schmitt (1998), 197; Shayegan (2011), 197-198.
[109] SEG VII.39; see Spek (2005), 406-407, no. 8.
[110] Minns (1915); MacKenzie (1987) [2011].
[111] Matīushchenko & Tamaurovka (1997), 61; Livshits (2003).
[112] Olbrycht (2015b), 264.

Although sparse and often fragmented, these sources demonstrate the complex political and cultural milieu of the Parthian Empire, and the various languages, calendars and terminology that were used by the imperial administration (as well as by other institutions, such as the Babylonian astronomers and temple scribes) in order to function across the consolidated territory. The spectrum of personal names, as well as vocabulary concerning priests, temples, calendars, ethnicity, etc., offer a more complex image of how Mesopotamian, Iranian and Hellenistic influences interacted within the various political, social and religious spheres.[113]

Archaeological Sites and Material Culture

Like the epigraphic remains that have survived the Parthian Empire, the material culture uncovered from various archaeological sites similarly provides an interesting (but largely incomplete) record for this period. The largest Parthian site that has been extensively excavated is the citadel fortress of Nisa in southern Turkmenistan - also known in ancient times as Mithradatkirt, the 'Fortress of Mithradates', and referred to by modern archaeologists as Old Nisa (as opposed to the main city New Nisa, situated only a few hundred metres away from the fortified citadel). Excavations began at Old Nisa in the 1930s under A.A. Maruščenko, and were resumed after the Second World War by the Complex Archaeological Expedition of South Turkmenistan (JuTake), and in the 1990s by the joint Turkmen-Italian Archaeological Project.[114]

The ostraca fragments from Old Nisa indicate that various estates on the outskirts of the city produced grapes, raisins, vinegar and wine; however, the inner workings of the citadel fortress remain unclear. The monumental nature of the main architecture and topography suggest that the site principally held a sacred and ceremonial function. Pilipko has commented, "Among the four buildings of the Central Complex, the Tower-like Structure and the Building

[113] See, for example, Spek (2005) on the interaction of Greek and native communities in Babylon under the Hellenistic Seleucid kings, and later under the Iranian Arsacid kings.
[114] Invernizzi (2004) and Lippolis (2011) provide an overview of the archaeological expeditions in Old Nisa.

with the Round Hall are recognised as unquestionably religious, but the nature of the religion and the specific purpose of these sanctuaries has yet to be established. The Tower-like Structure contains certain elements characteristic of Iranian religious architecture such as peripheral corridors and auxiliary rooms to the sides of the main entrance, but, on the whole, its plan is original and no close analogues are known."[115] Clay fragments discovered in the 1990s within the Round Hall are thought to have belonged to a group of life-size statues that depicted various early Arsacid kings and ancestors dressed in Greek-style costume. One of these fragments showed the bearded bust of an elderly man, identified by Invernizzi as Mithradates I – the Great Arsacid king who was apparently deified by his son.[116] The ceremonial buildings at the heart of the Nisa citadel in all likelihood celebrated the splendour, glory and kingship of the Arsacid dynasty, ruling with the favour of the divine world.

While the evidence from the Nisa ostraca demonstrates the predominate Iranian character of the native population and its religious institutions, the iconographic evidence reveals more about the influence of the Greek artistic tradition on the art of this city. Marble statues of Greek deities and ivory rhytons decorated with friezes showing figures from the Greek pantheon are amongst the treasures unearthed in the Square House that demonstrate the influence of Hellenism on the art of the city's elites.[117] Nevertheless, the workshops and craftsmen of Nisa blended these Hellenistic artistic models with more localised materials and ideas – such as the lower part of the marble statue of Aphrodite Anadyomene that was made of local stone, or the layout of various

[115] Pilipko (1994), 114 cites the studies of earlier excavators Pugačenkova (1958), 102-103; Krasheninnikova & Pugačenkova (1964); Koshelenko (1977), 57-65.

[116] Invernizzi (2001), 141-147; *ibid*. (2011a), 196-200, fig. 8; *ibid*. (2011b), 655-657. See the S16 coinage of Phraates II, in which the king uses the title *theopatoros* '[son of] a divine father'. See also the Hung-e Azhdar rock relief near Izeh (Khuzestan Province) that depicts a mounted Mithradates I on the left hand side of the scene, wearing what seems to be Greek costume; the four figures standing frontally to the right and dressed in Elymaean costume were added at a later date; Vanden Berghe (1963) pls. LII, LVI; Kawami (1987), 209-213, pls. 57-60, fig. 25; Messina, Mehrkian & Rinaudo (2014); Messina (2016).

[117] The original function of the Square House of Old Nisa (the largest building excavated on the citadel) in unknown. It has been proposed that the building, with its central courtyard and surrounding rooms built with rows of mud-brick benches, was a royal ceremonial centre that could accommodate a large number of the local nobility, perhaps for a ceremonial feast. In later years, the building was sectioned off and converted into sealed storerooms, which had been filled with various luxury goods; Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 13-19; Invernizzi (2000).

buildings that shows parallels with Central Asian architecture.[118] In addition, some materials and objects unearthed at the citadel testify to the trade networks that stretched across the wider region; for example, ivory rhytons and furniture legs, as well as a vessel made of lapis lazuli that shows links to neighbouring Bactria.[119] The difficulties of interpreting this varied material culture for the Parthian period are addressed in greater detail below.[120]

While the citadel of Old Nisa was founded in the early Parthian period and continued until its decline in the 1st century AD under the Arsacids, the Parthian Empire's other principal cities – namely Ecbatana, Rhagae, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Susa – provide more complex sequences of archaeological strata that both predate the Parthian period, and succeed it. As a result, fewer finds can be easily dated to the time of the Parthian kings.[121] The best-preserved examples of Parthian art are generally dated to periods later than the 2nd-1st centuries BC. While Mithradates II's rock relief at Bisotun provides an interesting example of this type of monumental work, the scene has been largely damaged and the image of the Arsacid king is almost completely obscured.[122] Later works that depict kings and the divine include the rock reliefs of Gotarzes II (c. AD 40-51) at Bisotun and Sar-i Pol-i Zohab in western Iran (both significantly damaged); the rock relief of a King Vologases standing before an altar, also at Bisotun; the bronze statue of a Parthian prince, perhaps Phraates IV (c. 38-2 BC) found at Shami (Khuzestan Province); and the inscribed bronze statue from Mesene, identified as Herakles-Verethragna and dedicated in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in AD 151.[123]

In terms of religious sites, archaeologists have discovered traces of several fire temple structures that were established in the north and east of the Parthian Empire and in Bactria: these include Shahr-e Qumis in western

[118] Invernizzi (2011b) provides a survey of the main structures on the citadel.
[119] See p. 119 below.
[120] See pp. 59 ff. below.
[121] Overviews of Parthian period art and architecture are provided by Downey (1986) [2011] and Keall (1986) [2011], with further bibliography.
[122] See pp. 36-37 above.
[123] Herzfeld (1920), 36 ff.; Ghirshman (1962), 53, fig. 65; Colledge (1977), 89-93, pls. 15-16; Pennacchietti (1987); Curtis, V.S. (1993b).

Khorasan (ancient Hecatompylos); Kuh-e Khwajeh in Sistan; Mele Hairam in south-western Turkmenistan; Takht-i Sangin in northern Afghanistan; and possibly at Surkh Kotal, in central Afghanistan. Moreover, a number of sites in Uzbekistan and central Turkmenistan show evidence of once having housed a sacred fire, and are associated with the ancient Chorasmians and Dahae. In southern and western Iran, fire temple sites have been found tentatively at the ancient city of Susa in Khuzestan and at Persepolis in Fars (known as the *frataraka* temple) – though their attribution as "fire temples" remains uncertain.[124]

[124] See p. 23 above.

III. Parthian Period Numismatic Sources

The surviving coins of the Arsacid kings and their vassal counterparts are a fundamental primary source in any examination of the Parthian period.[125] The coins provide the most extensive evidence for this empire both geographically and chronologically, attesting to the reign of more than forty Arsacid rulers over five centuries of Parthian rule. Their place of production ranges from the capital of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Mesopotamia to the oasis city of Merv on the edge of Turkmenistan's Karakum dessert. Moreover, the coinages of Parthia's sub-kingdoms in Persis, Elymais and Characene portray the meeting of native iconography with wider ideologies of power, while issues emanating from dynastic factions based in regions such as Media Atropatene and Margiana allude to the changing topography of the empire. These objects piece together a historical narrative of the period, linking successive kings through genealogies, establishing the burgeoning expansion of Parthian power into new mints and regions, celebrating the sovereign's victories, and asserting a contender's claims to power with the striking of a rival coinage. Despite its great potential, Parthian coinage has continually been overshadowed in historical examinations of this empire. This thesis examines Parthian political and religious ideologies in 2nd and 1st centuries BC using the coinage as its main point of focus. The significance of the coin evidence with regard to this particular period is discussed in greater detail below.

1. Arsacid Coinage

Drachms

Under Mithradates II (and generally throughout Parthian history), the most widely struck denomination across the Parthian Empire was the silver drachm. The drachm was struck mainly in mints across the Iranian highlands. The principal Parthian mint at Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) produced the bulk

[125] Comprehensive catalogues and typologies of Parthian coinage have been produced by Wroth (1903); Sellwood (1980) – a revised second edition ollowing its first publication in 1971; Shore (1993); Sinisi (2012); Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).

of the Mithradates II's drachms; the city of Rhagae-Arsacia (modern Ray) was the second largest producer of drachms during this period.[126] This denomination depicted the iconic Parthian archer on the reverse, first seated on an *omphalos*-style stool at the start of Mithradates II's reign, and later shown on a high-backed throne with a footrest at his feet (Figures 18-23). Slight variations in this design occurred under this king (e.g. archer holding bow in two hands, archer holding bow and arrow in one hand, etc.), most likely to distinguish different series of issues during parts of his long reign.[127] Subsequently, the enthroned archer motif remained unchanged except in its artistic execution until the end of Arsacid rule in AD 224. This archer type and its significance in Parthian ideology are examined in greater detail in Chapter Three.

Tetradrachms

The highest value denomination in the Parthian period was the silver tetradrachm (= four drachm), which was struck almost exclusively at the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Mesopotamia (near modern Baghdad).[128] Founded by Seleucus I in c. 305 BC, this city retained a strong Hellenistic character that is evident from the surviving coin iconography. Following Mithradates I's conquest in c. 141 BC, new tetradrachms struck in the name of the Arsacid king showed image of a standing Herakles on the reverse, whilst an enthroned Zeus Aetophoros ('bearing an eagle') of the Alexandrine type was depicted on the reverse of the drachms (Figures 9-10).[129] Greek gods (typically the city goddess Tyche) continued to be depicted on Seleucian Arsacid coinage under Mithradates I's successors, until Mithradates II introduced the iconic Parthian

[126] Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[127] S26.1-24.
[128] McDowell (1935), 158. Some small tetradrachm productions from Susa are known: S14.1-2 minted under Phraates II, S18.2 minted under Artabanus I, and an unpublished type minted under Mithradates II. These Susa issues all depicted Apollo Toxotes ('the archer') on the reverse type. Tetradrachms of Phraates II that were minted at Ecbatana were also recorded by Sellwood (S15.1), and show the Parthian seated archer on the reverse. However, no specimens of this type are known to the author.
[129] S13.

seated archer motif to the tetradrachms of this mint (Figure 17).[130] Although production of the tetradrachms was established in the west of the Parthian Empire, these coins did occasionally circulate eastwards.[131] In his study on the coinage excavated at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, McDowell noted that two distinct currency belts had formed by the Parthian period: the first was dominated by users of tetradrachms, and ran from Syria across to Babylonia, into southern Mesopotamia (and the kingdom of Characene) and finally into the south/south-west of Iran (to the kingdoms of Persis and Elymais); the second was dominated by users of drachms, extending from northern Mesopotamia across northern and central Iran.[132]

Bronze Denominations

Bronze coinage, typically with its iconography worn and the metal corroded, is rarely featured in studies of the Parthian Empire. The designs used for this lower tier of coinage were drawn from Seleucid prototypes that were recycled and adapted for a Parthian audience. During the reign of Mithradates II, the principal bronze coinage underwent a systematic iconographic reform (Figures 81-96): tetrachalkoi were struck with the image of a horse walking right, and later with the image of a winged horse flying right; dichalkoi were struck with the image of a horse's head facing right, and later Nike walking right carrying a palm branch and diadem; chalkoi were struck with the image of a bow in a case, and later with a Heraklean club; and hemichalkoi were struck with the image of Nike walking right with a palm branch and diadem (however, this denomination seems to have been discontinued in the king's later years, when the Nike motif was transferred to the dichalkoi). The consolidation of certain iconographic designs per bronze unit under Mithradates II suggests that these denominations were overseen by the king's overarching administration. These principal bronze issues are examined in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[130] S24.1-8
[131] For example, IGCH 1814 - a hoard of c. 13,000 silver coins including c. 25 tetradrachms of Mithradates II, unearthed in Hyrcania.
[132] McDowell (1935), 179-181.

In contrast to the principal mints of northern and central Iran, the cities of Nineveh in northern Mesopotamia, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in central Mesopotamia and Susa in south-western Iran administrated their mints according to local policy. A hoard of bronze coinage found at Nineveh shows the royal portrait of Mithradates II on a small handful of specimens; moreover, his standardised motifs appear on the reverse, such as the walking horse, the horse head and the goddess Nike holding a diadem band and palm branch.[133] The very light weights and small diameters of these coins, however, indicate that they served a closed, localised economy, despite the use of more universal motifs as seen on coinage of this period. In Seleucia, civic bronze coinage was issued in the name of the city alone; no references to the Arsacid king were made in the legend or iconography. In Susa, bronze chalkoi were struck with the reverses showing a variety of images (often depictions of the divine or their attributes) that were changed frequently (Figures 97-102). These were, nevertheless, struck with the image of Mithradates II on the obverse, and his epithets were included in the legend.

Royal Portraits on Coinage

On all silver and bronze coin issues produced in Mithradates II's mints, the king's portrait appeared on the obverse. Throughout most of Mithradates II's reign, the Arsacid king was shown wearing the diadem band as a symbol of his royalty; in his later years, a highly decorated tall tiara was adopted and demonstrated the splendour of this 'Great King of Kings'. Chapter Two examines Mithradates II's royal portraits, titles and epithets in greater detail.

Seleucid Prototypes and Influences

The iconographic prototypes for Parthian silver and bronze coinage largely stem from the royal Hellenistic coin types. It was under the Seleucid dynasty that new mints were established eastwards of the Tigris River to the

[133] IGCH 1781; le Rider (1967); Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).

borders of India from the early 3rd century BC.[134] The coined currency that was introduced reflected the art and ideology of this Hellenistic empire. Once power had passed to the Arsacid kings in c. 247 BC, the established minting habits of the former empire were continued under the new Iranian dynasty with relative conservatism, and adjustments were made within the framework of what was already familiar to handlers of these coins. The seated Parthian archer, who appeared on the *omphalos* at the start of Mithradates II's reign, was reminiscent of the Seleucid's ubiquitous archer Apollo motif (Figure 44); the figure is, nevertheless, purely Parthian in his costume and accoutrements. The obverse portrait, truncated to the neck on Seleucid coinage, was expanded under the early Arsacids to include the royal costume. The king's epithets struck in the Greek language, moreover, were elaborated beyond what had been known on earlier Seleucid coinage. Under Mithradates II, the Achaemenid title 'King of Kings' was incorporated into the coin legend, expanding the Greek inscription to five lines: *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ* '[of the] Great King of Kings Arsaces Epiphanes'. Mithradates II's bronze coinage combined motifs that had been drawn from the Seleucid repertoire, including the walking horse, or the bow in a case that the Seleucids had used in reference to their victories against the famed Parthian archers. The iconography of the bronze chalkoi from Susa and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris has been noted as particularly Greek in character. Catalogue typologies have continually referred to the images of the divine that are depicted on these issues as purely Greek in tradition: Zeus' thunderbolt, Herakles' club, Apollo, Artemis, etc.[135] While the iconography on Parthian coinage is undoubtedly inspired by Hellenistic images of royalty and the divine, it is evident that these models were adapted and reinterpreted under the Arsacid kings to suit the new dynasty and the cultural makeup of their empire. The new approach taken by some scholars in recent years to understand Parthian motifs from a Parthian perspective has been necessary in order to recognise the developing Arsacid character of the coin design within the slow-changing and conservative nature of the evidence.[136] Aspects of the

[134] Aperghis (2004), 214-216.
[135] S23.6, S23.7, S24.43, S26.31
[136] See 'IV. Literature Rieview' below for a fuller discussion of the scholarship that has focused on Arsacid coin iconography and its significance in the Parthian sphere.

king's portrait, his titles and the varied reverse iconographies on the coinage are the principal areas of examination in this thesis, and provide a new perspective on the political and religious ideologies that were developing during this transformative period.

In the same way that Arsacid coin iconography drew from Seleucid prototypes, the denomination system was also adopted from the former dynasty. Whilst political turmoil ensued in the expansion of the Arsacid dynasty from its rebellious beginnings in the mid-3rd century BC to its consolidation under Mithradates II in the late 2nd century BC, adhering to the same denominations of the former empire allowed for a smoother transition to Arsacid rule, whether coined money was being used to pay soldiers, receive levies, measure salaries, maintain long-distance trade, etc. In fact, hoard evidence indicates that earlier coins of the Hellenistic kings remained in circulation, and were displaced only gradually throughout the Parthian period as new Arsacid coins were issued to "top up" the system.[137]

Coin Values

It is difficult to determine the value of Parthian coinage due to the limited evidence of recorded transactions. The Avroman documents state the price of a vineyard in western Iran as 55 drachms (also a partially sold vineyard as 40 drachms), and a penalty of 200 drachms was to be paid to the king should the contract be breached.[138] Inscriptions found at Susa indicate that a fine of 3,000 drachms was due to the temple of Nanaia should someone attempt to re-enslave a person who had been manumitted and consecrated to the goddess.[139] Details of these fines to the king and to the temple indicate that substantial amounts of coined silver were directed towards the treasuries of temple and royal institutions. Spek has examined cuneiform material from the Rahimesu Archive in Babylon to try and determine average wages in this part of the

[137] McDowell (1935), 204.
[138] Minns (1915), 28-32.
[139] Inscriptions published by Franz Cumont in 1928-1933 have been collated and reproduced in Potts (1999), 366-368.

Parthian Empire. His conclusion (offered with caution) states that wages were apparently quite low in the spring of 93 BC, when these documents were created.[140] A group of millers received 2½ shekels (= 5 drachms) in one particular month to share between them; a porter received between ⅔-1 shekel (= 1⅓-2 drachms) per month; a cleaner received 1½ shekels (= 3 drachms) a month; and a scribe received 2 shekels (= 4 drachms) per month.[141] About a century earlier and further east, a Graeco-Bactrian leather document dating to c. 220-170 BC stated that 100 drachms were due to a troop of forty Scythian (?) mercenaries, averaging 2½ drachms each (although whether this was shared equally is unknown, as is the length of service that these wages covered).[142]

Even less information is available for the values and uses of the contemporary bronze denominations. Two modest burials that date to c. 100 BC from a site c. 70 km south of Ecbatana (modern Hamadan) contained a small number of bronze coins: the first burial held one bronze issue of Mithradates I and fourteen bronzes of Mithradates II; the second burial contained ten bronzes of Mithradates II.[143] The workings of how the bronze coins were used is still not fully understood, although it is presumed that they fulfilled an everyday function and were restricted to local circulation.

Coins and History

In the first centuries of Parthian rule, Arsacid denominations generally reflect a reduced Attic standard (with a regular Attic drachm weighing 4.3 grams, and tetradrachm weighing 17.2 grams).[144] More than 7,900 coins of

[140] Spek (1998), 252-253 estimates that a family of five would require a minimum of c. 2.8 shekels of silver (= 5 drachms) per month in order to feed themselves sufficiently, depending on the price of barley and other commodities. Spek further outlines three main factors that may explain the low wages of some workers. Firstly, the evidence from the Rahimesu Archive dates to the spring of 93 BC, just before the harvest time. This is when grain supplies would be at their lowest. Secondly, cuneiform evidence from the *Astronomical Diaries* (which record the prices of five staple commodities in Babylon), indicates that prices could severely fluctuate during this period, in turn affecting the cost of living. Thirdly, workers may have received additional income from other jobs or paid roles within the Babylonian administration.

[141] Spek (1998), 222-226 (Text 13), 229-231 (Text 18).

[142] Clarysse & Thompson (2007), 275-276.

[143] IGCH 1810, 1811.

[144] Abgarians & Sellwood (1971), 108-109.

Mithradates II have been amalgamated as part of the *Sylloge Nummorum Parthicorum*, and this vast collection allows for a more nuanced perspective on how these issues were minted across the reign of this king.[145] A sample size of 549 tetradrachms of Mithradates II shows an average weight of 15.74 grams, indicating an equivalent drachm weight of 3.93 grams. This coincides with the average drachm weights for Mithradates II's earliest types that, like the tetradrachms, display the iconic Parthian archer seated on an *omphalos* in the reverse design: S23 averaging 3.91 grams; S24, 3.90 grams; and S25, 3.83 grams. However, Mithradates II's subsequent drachms depicting the iconic Parthian archer enthroned, and later including the grand epithet 'King of Kings' show a slightly higher average weight above 4 grams.

Table 1: Average weights of Parthian tetradrachms, c. 141-91 BC

King and Sellwood Type	*Average Weight (grams)*	*Sample Size (no. of coins)*
Mithradates I, S13 (c. 141-132 BC)	14.86	61
Phraates II, S17 (c. 128-126 BC)	16.03	18
Arsaces VIII/Bagasis, S18.1 (c. 126 BC)	15.80	16
Artabanus I, S21 (c. 126-122 BC)	15.62	25
Arsaces X, S23 (c. 122-121 BC)	15.78	18
Mithradates II, S24 (c. 121-91 BC)	15.74	549

Table 2: Average weights of Mithradates II drachms, S23-S28[146]

Drachms by Sellwood Type	*Average Weight (grams)*	*Sample Size (no. of coins)*
S23	3.91	5
S24	3.90	747

[145] The SNP project takes into account the coinage from seven major institutions and collections (The British Museum in London, Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, Staatliche Museen in Berlin, Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, American Numismatic Society in New York, National Museum of Iran in Tehran, and David Sellwood's personal collection), as well as coins that have appeared in trade. See Curtis, V.S. *et al* (forthcoming 2018) for the second volume of the SNP, focusing on coinage of Mithradates II, and with an up-to-date metrological analysis.

[146] This table represents the average weights for various drachm types of Mithradates II; a more in depth metrological discussion can be found in SNP 2; see Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

S25	3.83	14
S26	4.05	781
S27	4.02	1,404
S28	4.01	1,244

Studies have noted the declining weight of Seleucid tetradrachms to below 17 grams in the first half of the 2nd century BC, initially caused by the heavy war indemnity of 15,000 talents that was imposed by the Romans in 189 BC as part of the Treaty of Apamea, as well as further military expenditure, particularly under Antiochus IV (175-154 BC).[147] The value of Seleucid tetradrachms fell a second time in 128 BC when Seleucia-on-the-Tigris was re-conquered by the Parthians, and from this point onwards the Hellenistic dynasty failed to stabilise their coinage to the Attic standard. Their tetradrachms steadily declined in value as their borders were further encroached by Roman expansion from the west and Parthian expansion from the east.

When the Parthians first invaded Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in 141 BC under Mithradates I, the conqueror's new tetradrachms reflected the continuing instability of the period, weighing on average less than 15 grams. Military conflict ensued in the region, and by the end of Mithradates I's reign, Seleucia had been re-captured by the Seleucids. With Phraates II's re-conquest of Seleucia in 128 BC, the Arsacid tetradrachms seem to have increased their value to over 16 grams; however, under subsequent kings, the denomination failed to rise above this mark.

The scholars van der Spek, Huijs, Pirngruber and van Leeuwen have approached the economic fluctuations of this period from a different perspective by using the price lists and environmental observations of the *Astronomical Diaries* to find patterns between climate deterioration and rising regional conflict. This, it is argued, led to escalating prices in the staple commodities (namely barley and dates) and weakened the purchasing power of

[147] Houghton (2004), 13-15.

coined silver.[148] The *Astronomical Diaries* reveal that the second half of the 2nd century BC was a particularly troubled period for Babylonia and surrounding cities, starting with Mithradates I's invasion of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in 141 BC; followed by the Seleucid backlash in the 130s and the re-conquest of Mesopotamia and Media under Antiochus VII; the return of Arsacid rule to Seleucia in 128 under Phraates II, the rise of Hyspaosines in Characene and his joint raids with the Elymaeans across southern Mesopotamia in the 120s; reports of disease, sickness and food shortages throughout Mithradates II's reign in the years 123 BC, 118 BC, 112 BC, 108-106 BC, 104 BC, 94 BC and 91 BC; and finally the continued attacks and plundering carried out by Arab tribes.[149] Mithradates II's tetradrachms, showing the reverse design of the seated archer on an *omphalos*, indicate that the king struck this denomination only in the earlier years of his reign. In his study on Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, McDowell has criticised this minting programme, suggesting that Mithradates II forsook the region's economic potential and ignored its prestige in the western sphere in order to shift the heart of his empire to the Iranian highlands.[150] The more recent research on southern Mesopotamia, as well as the continued sub-standard weight of Arsacid tetradrachms, suggest that the region struggled to stabilise its economy in the second half of the 2nd century BC – whether the Arsacid kings were indifferent to the region or not.

In contrast, the drachms minted by Mithradates II in the Iranian highlands show a slight increase in value above 4 grams from the middle of his reign onwards. In parallel, the fragmented narrative of the *Astronomical Diaries* reports on Arsacid victories across this extensive region – victories which at one point earned the king the title *Soter* 'Saviour' on the S25 drachms. In the autumn of 119 BC, the cuneiform tablets document a letter that was sent from Mithradates II to the inhabitants of Babylon, in which the king claimed to have settled the nomadic threat on the eastern frontier and driven out his opponents

[148] Spek (1998); Huijs *et al.* (2015).
[149] Huijs *et al.* (2015), 143 note the "crisis years" in the 130s BC, which resulted in the extreme prices recorded in the *Astronomical Diaries* in the years 126-124 BC.
[150] McDowell (1935), 205.

to the high mountains.[151] In 112 BC, the same source remarks on Arsacid activity in the northern Mesopotamian city of Nisibis that was led by the figure of Mitradata, also known as the 'chief of the troops'.[152] It was presumably around this period that Mithradates II's forces won a victory against Armenia, taking the prince Tigranes as a political hostage and incorporating part of the region into the Parthian Empire.[153] By 111 BC, the texts refer to Mithradates II as the 'King of Kings'.[154] In 96 BC, the *Astronomical Diaries* record the death of the sitting Armenian king; subsequently, the tablets state, the prince Tigranes was placed on the Armenian throne.[155] While the value of the Parthian drachms in the mints of the Iranian plateau increased during this period, it is interesting to note the parallel iconographic developments that unfolded in the same years: the archer's *omphalos* was swapped for a regal throne on the S26 series; the introduction of the grand title 'King of Kings' on the S27 series; the special star decoration on the costume of the king's obverse portrait, and the advent of the Parthian bejewelled tall tiara on the final S28 series.

The limited hoard evidence shows that these drachms were accumulated in the regions of northern Mesopotamia, and modern Armenia and Azerbaijan.[156] The developing kingship ideology expressed in the iconography of the royal Arsacid coinage evidently shared some characteristics with the neighbouring Armenia kingdom, whose own iconic tiara was introduced by Tigranes shortly after 96 BC. In the same year that Tigranes ascended the Armenian throne with the help of the Arsacid dynasty, Mithradates II's envoy Orobazus met the Roman magistrate Sulla on the Euphrates to officiate relations between the two growing empires. McDowell connected this meeting with Parthia's growing interest in Armenia, and claims that their desire for further expansion could have benefitted from an ally in Asia Minor.[157] While the western sources and approach to Parthia have continually focused on the

[151] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -118 A rev. A18-A21.
[152] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -111 B rev. 6ff., C 2-6.
[153] Strabo, 11.14.15.
[154] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -110 rev. 1. See also Curtis, V.S., *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[155] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -95 C obv. 5-7, D obv. 10-11.
[156] IGCH 1744-1746, 1784, 1788.
[157] McDowell (1935), 206.

Hellenised city of Seleucia and its environs, an approach angled on the Iranian highlands and its routes into Armenia to the west and new trading links to the east is perhaps more appropriate. In fact, the northern expanse of the Parthian Empire was culturally more akin to the Arsacids and their horse breeding customs, seemingly more economically prosperous during this particular period, and receptive of the major iconographic developments that took place under Mithradates II.

While the silver coinage, its weight fluctuations and its patterns of circulation reflect one tier of Parthia's monetary output, the bronze coinage represents a second and much less examined tier. Unlike the silver coinage, bronze issues were not produced according to a strict standard, and so their weights and diameters varied slightly. Towards the end of Mithradates II's reign, the dimensions of the individual bronze denominations had become almost indistinguishable from one another. Bronze civic coin finds from Seleucia have been unearthed in substantial numbers in Susa and vice-versa, suggesting that there was a significant movement of people and goods between these two cities. Throughout the rest of the Parthian Empire, bronze coinage was not only standardised to certain iconographic configurations, but also on occasion monogrammed. The themes behind the reverse motifs, particularly horses and archery, also allude to the culture of the Iranian highlands.

2. Coinage of Vassal Kingdoms and Rebel Kings

Parthia's relations with its subject kingdoms become magnified under the evidence of coin production in the regions. Coin issues struck by privileged vassal rulers in Persis (modern Fars, southern Iran), Elymais (Khuzestan, south-western Iran) and Characene (southern Iraq) have shown different structures of power forming under the aegis of the Arsacid overlord. Under Mithradates II, the relationship between vassal and Arsacid overlord was still being defined.

Characene

In southern Mesopotamia, a revolt carried out by Hyspaosines, king of Characene, was eventually brought to an end under Artabanus I (c. 127-123 BC). The Characenian became a subject of the Arsacid king, and an ally in neighbouring military conflicts, until his death in 124 BC.[158] A young son of his was placed on the throne in Characene, according to the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*, and coin issues continued to be minted under this new ruler until c. 120 BC.[159] In the Arsacid sphere, bronze coin issues of Hyspaosines I or II were overstruck by Mithradates II, and dated to the year 122/121 BC.[160] After the final issues of Hyspaosines II in c. 120 BC, no further coinage was struck in Characene until the emergence of a prince Apodakos in 110/109 BC – not long after Mithradates II had cast himself as the 'King of Kings'.[161]

Elymais

In Elymais, the total absence of coin evidence suggests that a different political relationship had formed between this kingdom and the dominant Parthian Empire. Throughout Mithradates II's reign, no coinage was struck by an Elymaean ruler. Minting practices only resumed here under Kamnaskires III (c. 82/81-73/72 BC) after the Parthian Empire had been plunged into its so-called "Dark Age". Like Characene, Elymais had put up a fierce resistance to the arrival of the Arsacids in western Iran and Mesopotamia, and had even united with Hyspaosines and his rebellious forces in c. 133 BC.[162] However, although Hyspaosines conceded his rebellion and entered into an alliance with the Arsacid Artabanus I in c. 125 BC, a rebel named Pittit arose in Elymais by the end of the same year. The Arsacid army waged war against Pittit, and the challenger was defeated by January of 124 BC.[163] Both Characene and Elymais were strategically significant, with the former situated at the convergence of the great Mesopotamian rivers and the Persian Gulf, and the latter based in the Zagros Mountains above the key city of Susa. The absence of new silver issues in

[158] Potts (1999), 391; Shayegan (2011), 110-120.
[159] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. –123A, Obv. 18-20; Assar (2009a), 134-135.
[160] S23.4.
[161] This title appears in the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* on a tablet dated to 111 BC, see p. 52 above.
[162] Shayegan (2011), 86, 115 (Table 1).
[163] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. –124B, Rev. 12-14; Potts (1999), 391.

these regions is perhaps not surprising, considering that Mithradates II himself did not mint an extensive production of tetradrachms in the Mesopotamian mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. These patterns in the production of silver coinage during this period perhaps reflect a more centralised control over mints under Mithradates II, with power re-focused to the monetary centres of the Iranian highlands (Ecbatana and Rhagae-Arsacia).[164] Cribb has written on the ideology behind a more centralised control of minting practices: "The profit which could be made from coinage provided a stronger imperative for rulers to hold onto the production and management of coinage."[165] Indeed in AD 97, according to the account of the Chinese historian Fan Ye (AD 389-445), in the west of the empire of the Parthian king *Manqu* (interpreted by some as Parthian vassal Manuchihr I of Persis) Chinese traders were actively discouraged from attempting the sea route further west.[166] Instead, overland trade (which financially benefitted the Parthian Empire) was practiced.

Persis

In Persis, a different story is told by the surviving coin evidence. Silver drachms continued to be struck here under Darev I and Vadfradad III throughout Mithradates II reign (although precise regnal dates for the Persid kings remains unknown).[167] Not only were the kings of Persis permitted to continuously strike silver coinage (unlike their neighbours in Characene and Elymais), the reverse designs of their drachms depicted a religious scene showing the local king as a Mazdaean worshipper approaching a fire altar – similar in the style to the depictions of Achaemenid kings in the tomb reliefs at Naqsh-i Rustam. The Persid kings seem to have held a privileged position under their Arsacid overlords, and maintained an iconography on their coinage that reflected the royal religious traditions of their Achaemenid forbearers. As discussed above, Persis was an important centre of transmission for the

[164] See Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[165] Cribb (2009), 481.
[166] Wang, T. (2007), 100-101.
[167] Klose & Müseler (2008), 45, types 3/10-12; see Wiesehöfer (2009) [2009], table 1 for the various proposed chronologies of the Persid kings.

Mazdaean religious tradition, which would later become the dominant religious centre under the Sasanian kings.

Political and Religious Policies of Mithradates II in the Vassal Kingdoms

The varied policies toward these vassal coinages demonstrate the political balancing act that Mithradates II engaged in during the course of his reign. Power, to a certain extent, had to be conceded to loyal sub-rulers in order to maintain a cohesive empire of nations. It has often been speculated that the Arsacids maintained power through a feudal system of alliances that was politically vulnerable to rebellion and factions.[168] However, the surviving coin evidence (or lack thereof) of the vassal rulers during the reign of Mithradates II reflects the king's political manoeuvrings to secure a consolidated and stable empire. From this period onwards, developments in the coin iconography of these vassal kingdoms (particularly on the royal portraits, discussed further in Chapter Two) demonstrate the impact that Mithradates II had on the wider region as part of his desire to centralise his empire and formalise the visual language of royal splendour according to his own iconographic model.

These vassal kingdoms were granted the right to mint coinage by the Parthian sovereign. This privilege was vital to the imperial system as it showed the Parthian 'King of Kings' as the central "dispenser of power".[169] Coinage kept the imperial engine running, through the payment of taxes, the funding of wars, and payments made to the king and to religious institutions in coined silver. Mithradates II's authority to strike money (and to grant this right or take it away from his vassals) underlined his exclusive hold on economic – and hence military – power.[170] Thus, coinage was an important instrument in inseminating the aura and ideologies of the king throughout his whole territory.

[168] See pp. 57, 81-82 below.
[169] Cribb (2009), 477.
[170] Cribb (2009), 469 states generally, "Money becomes the muscle of the state", more specifically, it builds the "sinews of war".

IV. Literature Review

Several issues concerning the modern reception of Parthia's political and religious ideologies during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC have already been touched upon in the review of the historical sources. Many of these debates have their roots in the condemning attitudes of Parthia's enemies and successors; nevertheless, modern scholarship has grappled with the same issues relating to Hellenistic, Iranian, tribal and imperial identities within the ruling culture of the Arsacid kings. As a result, the Parthians are often perceived in muddled terms: they are called "barbarians", echoing the Graeco-Roman accounts of these kings ruling from horseback;[171] they are also labelled as "philhellenes" and adopters of Greek culture, despite their so-called base nomadic superstitions, instincts and customs.[172] In addition, although the empire of the Arsacid kings has been recognised by ancient and modern scholars alike as Rome's mighty rival in the East, its internal organisation is often seen as feudalistic, fragmented, and lacking in political focus.[173] With this perception of a disintegrated Parthian Empire, the words of Ferdowsi come to mind: "The chieftains who claimed descent from Arash, who were a valiant, impulsive, and stubborn clan, were scattered about in different corners of the world, each of them cheerfully ruling a petty kingdom."[174]

Criticism of the obscure political and religious structure of the Parthian Empire has tainted the way its art has been interpreted. The royal portraits on the coinage of the Arsacid kings moved away from the naturalistic finesse of their Hellenistic predecessors, favouring a more formal style with linear rows to indicate strands of hair and beard, and with a more schematic rendering of the costume and jewellery.[175] Moreover, the reverse iconography on Parthian coinage did not depict any overtly religious scenes, as is known from the

[171] Bellinger (1949), 75.
[172] McDowell (1935), 219.
[173] McDowell (1935), 220; Debevoise (1969), xxxviii-xxxix; Widengren (1969); *ibid*. (1976), 249 ff.; Engels (2011).
[174] Translation in Davis (2007), 529.
[175] McDowell (1935), 160-161.

coinage of their Sasanian successors.[176] Rather, the iconic seated Parthian archer was struck onto the numerous drachm productions, while various Greek deities, weapons, animals and other symbols were chosen for the bronze coin iconography. The German Iranologist E. Herzfeld interpreted these developments as a decline in the artistic skill of the Parthian period craftsmen. In 1941, he wrote "When the Iranians attempted to accept everything Greek […] they did not grasp the significance and proportion, but were entirely satisfied with semblance […] The result is a hybrid art, if art it can be called, which is neither Greek nor Iranian; it is of no inner or aesthetic value […]"[177]

In recent decades, scholarship has turned away from attitudes prevalent in the works of figures such as Herzfeld, and sought to re-adjust the way the Parthian Empire is approached.[178] This movement away from a Hellenocentric examination of the Parthians, as well as from anachronistic juxtapositions with the Sasanian Empire, has been of great importance to Parthian studies. As a result, a better understanding of Parthia's political and religious policies has started to emerge.[179] The Parthian king did not rule over a culturally homogenous state, but governed with the title 'King of Kings' at the apex of a diverse empire. With the dynamic nature of the Parthian Empire taken into consideration, arguments have continued to evolve on the pragmatic political and religious ideologies of its kings.

[176] The fire holder or altar was the principal motif shown on the reverse of the Sasanian coinage. On coins of Ardashir I (AD 224-242), the fire altar was depicted on its own; however, under successor kings, new variations of this type were introduced, showing two attendants either side of the fire altar, the king himself and a deity standing either side of the fire altar, and the king depicted twice standing either side of the fire altar; Schindel (2005) [2005].

[177] Herzfeld (1941), 286-287 as cited in Curtis, V.S. & Stewart (2007), 1.

[178] Criticism of the prevailing Hellenocentric attitude towards Parthia can be found in Schippmann (1986) [2016]; Russell (1988), 12; Curtis, V.S. & Stewart (2007), 1; Sinisi (2008), 240-241; Errington & Curtis, V.S. (2007), 118; Curtis, V.S. (2012a), 67; Rose & Stewart (2013), 120.

[179] It is important to note the great cultural and ethnic diversity that existed during this period. The Parthian kings ruled over remnants of Hellenistic settlers and aristocratic landowners, the peripheral Semitic populations of Babylonians and Jews, as well as a plethora of Iranian peoples from numerous countries and social spheres. Moreover, the various nations that constituted the Empire were transverse and connected by merchants travelling between the Mediterranean and China, while conflicts with Rome carried Parthian interests into the neighbouring kingdoms of Armenia, Pontus and Commagene.

1. Hellenism and Iranian Revival

In the examination of Parthian political and religious ideology, an important debate to address concerns, firstly, how did the Hellenistic legacy of Alexander and Seleucids impact Arsacid rule? Secondly, to what extent was there a revival of Iranian culture during the Parthian period? In the Pahlavi literature (outlined above), the rule of the Arsacids is viewed as a continuation of Alexander's policies in ancient Iran, which saw the splintering of the Persian Empire into ninety petty kingdoms.[180] The Iranian revival, according to these sources, began only under Ardashir I once the last king of the Arsacid house had been defeated. Proof of this revitalisation was found in the reformed political administration of the Sasanian Empire, and in the increasing centralisation of the Zoroastrian religion.

Modern notions of the Arsacid kings as unworthy protagonists in the Iranian revival of the post-Hellenistic period have been dispelled by Gnoli, who argues against this simplistic version of events. He states that the Parthian period should not be "considered as a kind of interruption in a linear and abstract process which is the national history of Iran [as though it were] a time of cultural syncretism dominated by Hellenism. […] the Parthians must be placed by right, like the Achaemenians and Sasanians, within the history of Iranism, although, of course, with their own characteristics."[181] Despite the propagandistic efforts of the Sasanian dynasty to draw a clear line between themselves and their Arsacid predecessors, the distinction between the two ruling houses was perhaps not as clear-cut. Olbrycht has suggested in his recent examination of the Sasanian dynasty's rise to power that the House of Sasan derived from the Gondopharid branch of the Arsacid family ruling in Indo-Parthia.[182]

The Arsacids were indeed the first Iranian kings to carve out an empire from the disintegrating Seleucid state that was ruled by foreign Hellenistic kings.

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[180] *Greater Bundahishn*, 33.14-15; see p. 57 above on Ferdowsi's version of these events.
[181] Gnoli (1989), 115-116. See more recently, de Jong (2005), 94 ff.
[182] Olbrycht (2016).

The Iranian character of the Arsacid kings is well established: Parthian (a north-western Middle Iranian language) was used as an administrative language, sometimes alongside the Greek language; Avestan month and day names were used in the Parthian calendar; the dynastic and personal names of the Arsacid kings were distinctly Iranian; and priestly figures of the Iranian religious tradition are attested in the Nisa ostraca, such as a *magus* and an *āturšpat*.[183] The Iranian character of the Parthian Empire is also recognised in its art, particularly with the frontal aspect in later coin portraits and rock reliefs.[184] Debevoise elaborates on this process: "Although the Parthian revolt was originally a reaction against Iranian Hellenism, its character as a steppe culture modified by Iranian and Bactrian contacts underwent considerable alteration in the presence of the more ancient cultures of Mesopotamia and the strong Hellenistic influence there. For a hundred or more years after the Parthians entered the Land of the Two Rivers [in c. 141 BC], Greek elements formed an important part of their culture, until at last they were overshadowed by another oriental reaction."[185] Opinions of this kind have placed a strong emphasis on the role of Hellenism in the formation of Parthian imperial art and ideology, suggesting that the Arsacid dynasty stepped out of the nomadic sphere and immediately clothed itself in the Hellenistic imperial culture that was left behind by the conquered Seleucid royal court; following this interpretation, the Iranian revival did not take off until at least a century later.

The adoption of Hellenistic elements in the ruling culture of the Arsacids was appropriate – if not expected - of the new imperial rulers of the region. This is particularly true of coinage, which tends to develop only gradually and conservatively in order to remain recognisable as legal tender.[186] This is not to say that Parthian coinage was "derivative" of Hellenistic prototypes in the negative sense of the word. On a practical level, the continuation of Hellenistic coin denominations, legends and iconographic

[183] Boyce (1986) [2016]; Rose (2011), 66, 72-73. Furthermore, Russell (1988), 15-16 has brought to attention the fact that "religious names and vocabulary borrowed from Parthian and preserved in Armenian, are thoroughly Zoroastrian."
[184] Kurz (1993), 560.
[185] Debevoise (1969), xli-xlii. See also Rawlinson (1887).
[186] See pp. 79-81 below on these functional aspects of coin production.

models minimised the political disruption caused by the Parthian conquest. On an ideological level, the adaption of certain Hellenistic elements on the coinage of the Arsacids heralded their victory over their former Seleucid kings, and underscored their legitimacy to rule by right of conquest. Alongside these important markers of continuity with the Seleucid regime, recent studies on the coinage of Parthia have highlighted innovations in the coin design that were introduced as early as the 2nd century BC when the Arsacid conquest swept westwards into the more Hellenised centres of Media and Mesopotamia, and which pronounced the fundamentally Iranian character of the dynasty. V.S. Curtis has drawn attention to these innovations - in particular, the royal costume and imagery surrounding the *khvarnah* or divine splendour. The diadem band worn over a bare head was adopted by Mithradates I (c. 165-132 BC) as a symbol of kingship in the style of the Seleucid kings (Figure 8).[187] Just a few years later, however, Artabanus I (c. 126-122 BC) introduced the decorated Parthian V-necked jacket on his coin portrait, along with a spiralling torque (Figures 14-15).[188] From this point onwards, the Parthian royal costume was shown on Arsacid coinage, sometimes with magnificent decorations added to the sleeve and lapel area.[189] In the Parthian coin iconography of 1st century BC, the diadem was also portrayed in a way never seen under the former Seleucid kings: held in the beak of a falcon, which is identified as the Varegna bird that carries the *khvarnah* in the Avestan tradition (Figure 32).[190] This motif can be compared to the Achaemenid glazed plaque found in Persepolis, showing a falcon with wings splayed out, clutching a kingship ring or *khvarnah* pearl in each claw, with a third ring or pearl above its head.[191] Hellenistic and Iranian influences can also be detected in the titulature adopted by the Parthian kings on their coinage. Many scholars have highlighted the appearance of the epithet 'Philhellene' on coinage of Mithradates I following the king's victory in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in c. 141 BC, and reasoned about its meaning in terms of the

[187] S11-12; Curtis, V.S. (2012a).
[188] S18.2, S19-22.
[189] Curtis, V.S. (1998a); *ibid*. (2000); *ibid*. (2007a); *ibid*. (2007b); *ibid*. (2012a); *ibid*. (2016).
[190] Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 422-424; *ibid*. (2012a), 71-71; *ibid*. (2016), 182-185. See Yt. 19.35 on the Varegna bird as it flies away from King Yima with the *khvarnah*; see S52. 10 ff. for drachm types of Phraates IV (c. 38-2 BC) showing the eagle holding the diadem behind the king's portrait.
[191] Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 95, fig. 77.

Arsacids' developing ideology.[192] Nevertheless, just three decades later in c. 111 BC, Mithradates II adopted the title of the former Achaemenid kings as a demonstration of his imperial aspirations. This new title struck onto the coinage read in Greek *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ* '[of the] King of Kings'; at the same time, the epithet 'Philhellene' was removed from Mithradates II's coin legends.[193]

This dynamic interplay of Hellenistic and Iranian influences on the coin iconography and inscriptions must be kept in mind when thinking about political and religious ideologies during the Parthian period. It is generally recognised that coinage (particularly the silver denominations) catered for the top strata of the population, namely the noble class and wealthy landowners, as well as the prosperous merchant class. In the late 4th and 3rd centuries BC, these social classes stretching across the empires of Alexander and the Seleucid had been incorporated under an overarching elite Hellenistic culture.[194] The Greek *lingua franca* fused this elite class and gave its members a shared point of contact, as well as extensive political and business networks from India to Asia Minor. This accounts for the use of Greek script and Greek-inspired imagery on Parthian coinage.[195] However, Strootman has argued that an evolution away from Greek culture had already begun taking place in the Seleucid royal court, evidenced by the rise of "autochthonous aristocracies" within their empire – including the revolts of Andragoras in Parthia, Diodotus in Bactria, and the *frataraka* in Persis that all unfolded in the middle of the 3rd century BC.[196] The

[192] Shippmann (1986) [2016]. See, for example, Mittag (2002), 388-389, who argues that the epithet served to distance Mithradates I from his "barbarian" roots in order to appeal to potential allies in the Hellenistic world. Writing against this notion that the Parthian Empire was more Hellenistic than it was Iranian, see Wolski (1969); *ibid*. (1983); Traina (2005).

[193] S28; Curtis, V.S. (2012a), 70. See also recent discussions on the influences identified in Parthian coinage in Alram (1987b); Olbrycht (1997b); *ibid*. (2011); *ibid*. (2013b); *ibid*. (2014b); Cribb (2007); Sinisi (2008); *ibid*. (2015); Curtis, V.S., with bibliography listed in note 180 above.

[194] Strootman (2011a), 66.

[195] Sellwood (1980), 12.

[196] Strootman (2011a), 82 ff. has outlined the consequential events that led to this process: as Alexander began replacing the oriental elites and satraps in his court with his own Macedonian confidants, the former elites under the Persians withdrew from the centralised royal court and into their rural power bases, removed from urban political networks. By the reign of Antiochus II (c. 261-246 BC) and his successor Seleucus II (c. 246-225 BC), these shifting power spheres in the less-Hellenised regions had forced the Seleucid kings to accept Andragoras' and Diodotus' autonomy in Parthia and Bactria in the middle of the 3rd century BC. This mounting regional independence incited a reorganisation of the Seleucid court, with new bureaucratic roles being granted to non-Greek

rise of locally supported rulers strongly suggests that Hellenism was becoming increasingly decentralised from the royal court of the Seleucids, and this process was naturally accelerated with the rise to power of the Iranian Arsacids. Outside of those cities that remained highly Hellenised, Greek script and imagery on coinage provided little more that a superficial point of reference between the heterogeneous elites across the Parthian Empire. The increasing intelligibility of the Greek script on Parthian drachms from as early as the 2nd century BC further attests also to the movement away from a Greek elite culture.[197]

Outside of the coin material, the incorporation of Hellenistic and native elements into the art of the Parthian period has generated a great deal of debate and raised various issues of interpretation. What is Parthian art? Can it be defined in more precise words other than the chronological definition of the term 'Parthian' (i.e. mid-3rd century BC-early 3rd century AD)? When considering the diversity of the art from this period, from the eastern reaches of the empire at the Oxus River to the westernmost frontier of the Euphrates, the descriptive label 'Parthian' provides only a vague solution to these questions.

Archaeological campaigns in the Parthian city of Nisa and the Graeco-Bactrian city of Ai Khanoum have uncovered a wealth of material that speaks of the intricate cultural overlaps in these workshops based in this north-eastern region. The presence of Hellenistic influences in the art and architecture of Ai Khanoum, in particular, has been enthusiastically noted by classical historians, with familiar Greek art forms providing evidence of Alexander's colonists in the East, and their continued presence in this distant Greek "outpost" throughout

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elites. Although the positions of these non-Greeks were granted to them by their Seleucid overlord, these local rulers were also difficult to displace, considering their influence amongst their native populations. As Antiochus II and his heir began to acknowledge the rising influence of "autochthonous aristocracies", the resulting decentralisation of their power became beyond their control: "the Seleukid court developed from an institution where high military offices were distributed into one where the title of king could be obtained."

[197] McDowell (1935), 165-167. In contrast, the Greek script on tetradrachms minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, where Greek culture remained very active, maintained a high quality for a much longer period.

the Hellenistic period.[198] Nisa and Ai Khanoum have, however, also shown intriguing adaptions of Greek art forms alongside the use of local materials and native traditions, demonstrating the various cultural levels at play in these workshops and behind the figures who commissioned such artworks.[199] In his discussion on how to address the complexities of Parthian art, Invernizzi has stated, "The profound injections of novelty introduced in the Orient under Macedonian rule and variously spread and developed in the countries of the Parthian empire are a particularly showy feature, but not the sole distinctive element of a cultural life marked by older traditions that had not lost their vigour and acted variously in the individual regions."[200] The interplay between newer Hellenistic influences and more established native traditions in both eastern Parthian cities like Nisa and western cities such as Seleucia-on-the-Tigris or Dura Europos demonstrates that "culturally, these works sink their roots deep into a continuity of thought and mind attitudes that are Ancient-Oriental [and] Ancient-Mesopotamian."[201]

Therefore, the art that survives the Parthian period cannot be easily described in singular terms such as "Hellenistic" (or perhaps "pseudo-Hellenistic", following Herzfeld's assessment), but must be understood on its own terms with regard to the diversity of traditions and peoples living under the Arsacid king. This challenge is not new to studies of the ancient Near East: the art of the Achaemenid Empire, as well as the concept of kingship, was similarly influenced by Egyptian, Assyrian, Median and Scythian elements.[202] Kawami has also pointed out that Greek art was already known in the

[198] Holt (1999), 13, 18-19; Mairs (2010); *ibid*. (2014a), 8-10, 21-25.

[199] See, for example, studies by Bernard (1970a) and Curtis, V.S. (1996), 235 on the ivory furniture legs found at both Nisa and Ai Khanoum, carved with both Hellenistic and Achaemenid-inspired features; Pappalardo (2010) on the Nisa rhytons, displaying Greek subjects on the friezes of the rhytons intermixed with mythical creatures on the terminals, all carved onto Indian or Arachosian ivory, and found in the Square House treasury of Nisa amongst the ceremonial buildings linked to the celebration of the Arsacid dynasty; Invernizzi (2011a), 196-200 on the fragments of a monumental clay statue found in the Round Hall of Old Nisa, dressed in Greek costume and resembling Mithradates I, in a space interpreted as a *heroon* (from the Greek *ἡρῷον*, meaning a shrine that was dedicated to a hero, and used for his worship and commemoration) for the Arsacid dynasty.

[200] Invernizzi (2011a), 190.

[201] Invernizzi (2011a), 191.

[202] Calmeyer (1986) [2011]; Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 53-54; Curtis, J. (2005b); Razmjou (2005b); see pp. 182-185 below on the prototypes for the Achaemenid winged figure motif.

Achaemenid court prior to the conquest of Alexander in the region, and hence the adoption of Greek elements into the art of Iranian kings was not unprecedented by the time of the Arsacids.[203] Our understanding of how and why Greek artistic elements were assimilated into Parthian art must be considered cautiously in view of these issues.

2. Mazdaean Religion under the Arsacids

Under the heightened religious atmosphere of the Sasanian period, an increase in rhetoric against the Arsacids developed, in particular targeting their perceived lack of faithfulness to the Mazdaean religion. Later Pahlavi literature, such as the *Denkard*, emphasised the neglect of the 'Good Religion' under the Arsacids, insisting that the Avestan texts which survived Alexander's plundering in 330 BC were kept by priests for personal study only.[204] The use of Hellenistic divine iconography on the coinage of the Parthian kings (especially in contrast to contemporary Persid coinage that depicted the rulers worshipping before a fire holder) on the surface suggests that the Sasanians were correct in their prejudices. As such, some modern commentators have described the religion of the Arsacid period in similar terms. In 1967, Colledge remarked, "Once established the Arsacids never adopted full Zoroastrianism."[205] In more recent decades, scholarship has moved away from the historical perspectives that strove to obscure the religious identity of the Parthian kings. An understanding of the religious context in which the Arsacids came to power is needed in order to appreciate the foundations from which ideas on the divine took on a visual, iconographic expression.

Although the existence of the written Avestan texts that were supposedly burnt by Alexander is now doubted,[206] the eastern conquest of the Macedonian

[203] Kawami (1987), 31. See, for example, Boardman (1972), 303 ff. on Graeco-Persian engraved gems; and Meadows (2005), 200 ff. on Greek influences in the coinage of the western Achaemenid satraps; and on Greek influences in Persian art in general, Boucharlat (2002) [2010] and Miller, M.C. (2002) [2012].
[204] *Denkard*, 4.16.
[205] Colledge (1967), 103 as noted in Russell (1988), 15.
[206] See pp. 18-19 above.

king is thought to have fragmented the Achaemenids' administrative structure and religious traditions. As a result, centres of Mazdaean tradition were confined to localised priestly organisations. As the *Avesta* was transmitted orally amongst the Mazdaean worshippers, no fixed scripture anchored these localised practices into one canonised tradition.[207] The varied languages and cultures of the ancient Near East contributed to this process. Notably, an Old Sogdian version of the *Ashem Vohu* prayer (*Yasna* 27.14) has demonstrated that the *Avesta* was recited in this local dialect; moreover, linguistic elements from Arachosian, Sogdian and Parthian have been preserved in the Young Avestan language.[208] Variances in tradition may also be indicated in the western sources of the Graeco-Roman world (though their reliability on Iranian religion is generally cautioned). For example, Hintze has highlighted a passage in Pausanias' *Description of Greece*, in which the author describes the Lydian practice of worshipping in front of a fire altar with incantations read from a book. In contrast, Strabo's *Geography* claims that in Cappadocia the Magi worship before a fire altar, holding bundles of rods (*barsom*) and reciting incantations without the use of a book.[209] Hintze states that the *Avesta* was already widely inseminated throughout Iran before the Parthian period, and that these regional variations in traditions and pronunciation of the Avesta were the norm.[210]

When the Arsacids came to power in the Parthian satrapy in the mid-3rd century BC, the rituals and hymns of the Mazdaean religion continued to be transmitted orally. The first attempt to produce a written version of the *Avesta* is not attested until the reign of Vologases I in c. AD 51-78, according to the *Denkard*.[211] Therefore, without the anchor of an official written form, the Mazdaean religion during this period can only be studied by modern researchers in a predominately ahistorical context. Scholars have noted that

[207] de Jong (2010). See p. 21 above on the different centres of religious tradition outside of Persis.
[208] See p. 20 above.
[209] Hintze (1998), 149-150 on Pausanias, 5.27.5-6 and Strabo, 15.3.15.
[210] Hintze (1998), 158. A similar argument is presented by de Jong (2008), 20, who suggests that these different traditions can be described as a "plurality of Iranian religions -Sogdian, Bactrian, Armenian, Zoroastrian- only one of which, the Zoroastrian [tradition of Persis], happened to survive."
[211] See p. 18 above.

this a-historicity causes difficulties in disentangling the religion's inner developments, since it cannot be structured into a chronology or arranged into a linear development.[212] Regarding the later Pahlavi literature, Malandra states: "In sorting through these digests, one must attempt to distinguish what may have had an ancient Avestan origin and what derives from Sasanian or even Arsacid sources. What this means to the historian is that the disposition of the scriptural sources is almost entirely non-contemporaneous with times and eras that one wants to understand through them."[213]

A further complication rests in the fact that the archaic Avestan language was largely unintelligible to contemporary worshippers in Parthian times. Thus, the *Avesta* was probably "rarely used at all in a cognitive way, as a source to be consulted", with the religious knowledge of priests based more "on a much broader notion of the tradition."[214] Its verses did not function as moralistic sermons, but as poetry for sacrificial ceremonies.[215] De Jong has argued that religion practiced in the oral sphere during the Parthian period was "firmly based in family traditions." The best way to picture this, he continues, "is to imagine that Parthian noble families [such as the Karen and Suren] and local leaders, when they settled all over the empire, brought with them –as part of their family retinue– their family priests as well as that other important class of Parthian society, the *gosans* or minstrels."[216] These two spheres, the religious and the legendary, evidently stem from the same tradition, in which kings and the divine battle against hostile, evil forces.[217]

Another factor that has complicated our understanding of religion during the Parthian period is the influence of Hellenism. The presence of Alexander and his Seleucid successors in Iran introduced widespread images of

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[212] de Jong (2010); Hintze (2013), 2. Hoffmann (1987) [2011] outlines the various stages of development for the Old and Young Avestan languages in broad terms.
[213] Malandra (2005) [2005].
[214] de Jong (2008), 21. See also Malandra (1983), 27.
[215] Skjærvø (2003); Cantera (2012); Stausberg (2014) [2014]. Under the Sasanians, in contrast, the written *Avesta*, as well as its Pahlavi word-for-word translation and commentaries, provided a means to examine aspects such as morality in depth; see p. 16 above.
[216] de Jong (2008), 23.
[217] de Jong (2008), 21; Shaki (1994) [2011]; Kreyenbroek (2006) (2012); *ibid*. (2010), 104.

Hellenistic deities into the region. These representations of anthropomorphic deities certainly made an impact on coin design in the following Arsacid period (discussed in the following section). These Hellenistic deities have often been ignored in discussions on Iranian religion, since they are understood to be associated with Greek communities, and hence irrelevant to Iranian populations.[218] Kreyenbroek states that this way of thinking "ensures that no essential changes can be admitted in the history of a faith, since any novel element was by definition un-Zoroastrian." [219] He strongly rejects the assumption that "each religion has an 'essential' form or version, a sort of Platonic ideal, underlying and informing all actual expressions of the religion in question."[220] This is especially true of religion under the Achaemenids, as he points out, considering the array of traditions which co-existed and coalesced within the Persian Empire.[221] Non-Zoroastrian divinities were adopted under the Achaemenid kings, including the Mesopotamia Tir (conflated with the Avestan Tishtrya) and Nana, whose worship spread eastwards across the Persian Empire.[222] Though foreign in origin, these divinities were accepted into regional Iranian religious practice without any apparent issue.

The same religious atmosphere seems to have characterised the Parthian period, with the added factor that the Arsacid kings came to power following almost a century-long interlude of Hellenistic rule in Parthia, which brought with it a series of foreign Greek gods. In the Parthian citadel of Nisa, for example, ostraca attest to the *ayazan* or sanctuary of *Tīrenāk* 'Belonging to Tir' and of *Nanēstāwakān* 'of the Worship of Nana'.[223] They, moreover, record the use of Avestan month and day names. In the material culture of Nisa, images of deities were produced according to Hellenistic models; on one particular ivory rhyton, the Greek goddess Hestia (of the domestic hearth) is invoked in a Greek

[218] Boyce & Grenet (1991), 64-66; Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 418 ff. examines the Iranian character behind the Greek gods as depicted on Parthian-period coinage.
[219] Kreyenbroek (2010), 104.
[220] Kreyenbroek (2010), 103.
[221] Kreyenbroek (2010), 105 lists at least three western Iranian religious traditions that coexisted and merged to a certain degree under the Achaemenid kings: "1) the Elamite tradition; 2) the ancient Persian, 'Magian' tradition; and 3) Zoroastrianism."
[222] Potts (2001); de Jong (2008), 22; Shenkar (2014), 2; *ibid*. (2017), 6; Grenet (2015), 131 ff.
[223] See p. 26 above.

inscription below a decorative frieze showing divinities from the Greek pantheon.[224] Concerning the evidence for a non-essentialist religious ideology, Kreyenbroek argues for a more nuanced approach that "regards the development of a religion as a dynamic process, in which the original teachings of the faith naturally play a role, but which is informed at least as strongly by the way in which believers at a given time understand reality."[225] The religion of the Arsacid kings was not propagated as a centralised religion during this period, but rather existed outside the sphere of absolutism. Due to this foundation, the religion of the ruling class was influenced by their interactions with the heterogeneous populations of their empire. To disregard these contrasting religious influences would be to ignore the dynamic quality of the Arsacid state as it transformed during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC from a small kingdom to a great imperial power striving to prove its legitimacy amongst native Iranian, Mesopotamian, Hellenistic and other populations.

3. Depicting the Divine

It is clear that the incorporation of Hellenistic influences into coin iconography and inscriptions was a politically motivated manoeuvre (as well as a practical measure) by the Arsacids as their empire stretched into more heavily Hellenised cities scattered around Media and Mesopotamia. However, how the wider Iranian sphere viewed these images – in particular, images of deities - has remained a contentious subject. There is hesitation in some scholarship to interpret purely iconographic material that is presented without an identifying inscription as part of an Iranian cultural or religious tradition. Shenkar says of this process, "it is perhaps best to avoid such identifications. Without additional, preferably epigraphic evidence, we simply do not know whether Iranians considered this Greek imagery to represent their own gods."[226]

[224] Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 76; Bernard (1985), 90.
[225] Kreyenbroek (2010), 103. In a similar vein, Russell (1988), 15 has claimed that "recognition of Zoroastrian diversity… is fundamental to the study of the religion in Armenia."
[226] Shenkar (2014), 2. See also *ibid*. (2017), 384.

Syncretic deities from the Greek and Iranian traditions have been identified by means of accompanying inscriptions at various sites. For example, at the site of Nimrud Dagh in the kingdom of Commagene, deities shown in the stelae and statues dating to the 1st century BC are identified by the Greek inscriptions as Zeus-Ormasdes, Apollo-Mithras-Helios-Hermes, and Herakles-Verethragna.[227] The bronze statue captured in Mesene by Parthian forces in AD 151, and inscribed in Greek and Parthian, displays the god Herakles-Verethragna. Moreover, the inscription states that the statue was dedicated in the temple of Apollo-Tir in the city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.[228] After the demise of the Arsacid dynasty, the supreme god Zeus-Ohrmazd was identified in the multi-lingual inscription engraved on the investiture relief of the Sasanian Ardashir I from Naqsh-i Rustam.[229] Divine parallels were evidently recognised in these individual cases.

Further east, overlaps of Greek and indigenous deities are also apparent. From the northern Bactrian temple site of Takht-i Sangin, a stone altar supporting a bronze statue made in the image of the Greek satyr Marsyas (after whom a river in Phrygia was named) was dedicated; the accompanying Greek inscription states that this dedication was made to the god of the Oxus (*Vaxšu*).[230] In this instance, a statue of a Greek iconographic model was used to represent this native river deity. In later times, the coin iconography of the Kushan dynasty depicted a diversity of deities incorporating elements borrowed from the Hellenistic gods, amongst other influences.[231] For example, on coins of Huvishka (c. AD 140-180), the victory goddess Oanindo (Av. *Vanainti*), identified in the Bactrian inscription, is depicted in the image of the Greek Nike.[232]

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[227] IGLS 1.1, 1.52.
[228] Hackl *et a*l. (2010), 461-462 (III.1.3.E.3), 569-571 (III.2.6).
[229] Bach (1978), 281-282.
[230] SEG 31.1381.
[231] Rosenfield (1967), 69 ff. Other influences in the dynastic art of the Kushan period derive from Iran, India and the Roman world; see also Pons (2016) [2016] with further bibliography
[232] Rosenfield (1967), 91-92; Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), E.G1v. (19). The appearance of Oanindo on the gold coin issues of Huvishka coincides with the very diverse final phase of main mint's coin production. The goddess accounts for only 1% of the total distribution of the various gods on the coinage of Huvishka; see Bracey (2012), 203, table 2.

The influence of the anthropomorphic Greek gods on the iconography of the East has been recognised in scholarship.[233] This Greek tradition provided a large corpus of visual imagery from which artists could draw in order to represent the divine world. It is evident from the *Yashts* of the Iranian tradition that many *yazatas* were perceived in a human form. For example, some drive horse-drawn chariots, and in their hands they wield powerful weapons.[234] The imagery introduced by Greek artists into the region provided iconographic models that were varied enough to accommodate the equally diverse range of Avestan *yazatas* and their roles. Recognisable attributes, such as the club for example, identified the figure of Herakles as a warrior god in the Greek tradition; moreover, the club motif could evoke descriptions of his Iranian divine counterpart, usually Verethragna, the 'Smiter of Resistance'.

It is evident from the examples cited above that there existed many ways to visualise and interpret the divine. The act of depicting these deities was not a fixed process: gods joined under syncretic names could vary, such as Apollo, who is identified with Mithra in the sanctuary of Nimrud Dagh, and with Tir in a temple in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Some gods were artistically executed according a Greek tradition, and identified in the accompanying inscription as both a Greek and Iranian god (e.g. the bronze statue of Herakles-Verethragna from Mesene, depicted in the nude); other syncretic gods were represented in native costume (such as Apollo-Mithra in Nimrud Dagh, or Zeus-Ohrmazd on Ardashir I's relief at Naqsh-i Rustam). Furthermore, indigenous deities, such as the Bactrian Oanindo, could be visualised with borrowed Greek elements and identified in the inscription by their indigenous name only. This brief outline underlines some of the complexities of religious imagery during this period in cases when an identifying inscription *is* provided.

On Parthian coinage, identifying inscriptions for images of the divine were not made part of the coin design. Nevertheless, this has not prevented

[233] Rosenfield (1967), 69 ff.; Boyce (1975b); Boyce & Grenet (1991), 61 ff.; Curtis, V.S. (2007a); *ibid*. 2007b); Sinisi (2008); Rose (2011), 65, 83-84; Shenkar (2017), 384.
[234] Of course, some *yazatas* also transformed into other non-human forms, such as Verethragna's incarnations in *Yasht* 14 as a bold wind, a golden-horned bull, etc.

some scholarship from attempting to understand the deities on coins (and other objects) within a non-Greek context.[235] This lack of identification in the coin legends is not surprising given the formulaic and conservative nature of these inscriptions, which related to the Arsacid king, his titles and his epithets alone. In the Parthian period in general, writing was largely reserved for administrative purposes, as is evidenced from the surviving epigraphic material, such as the Nisa ostraca and legal contracts from Avroman. The transmission of religious traditions and legendary histories, in contrast, is recognised as part of the oral sphere.[236] This strong tradition of oral performance and transmission perhaps questions the need for inscriptions where visual imagery is provided – particularly when (as seen above in the case of Apollo) Greek iconographic models could be interpreted as different native divinities in different contexts.

The fact that the Arsacid dynasty did not impose a centralised religion on their empire is clear. Kreyenbroek comments, "The dearth of extant source material for this dynasty means that we cannot go beyond educated guesses, but it seems clear that the Arsacids, though Zoroastrians, did little to promote Zoroastrianism as an 'imperial' religion."[237] This is true in the sense that the Arsacids did not promote an "imperial religion" in the way that the Sasanians did during the heightened religious atmosphere of later centuries.[238] However, de Jong has argued that the religious beliefs and claims of the ruling dynasty were disseminated in a different way, which he described as "cultural radiance". That is, "[a] reliance on spreading Parthian culture (including religion as practiced in a family context) by setting an example to be emulated all the way down through the (extensive) network of families and officials that built the core of the empire."[239] This, he argues, was carried out to a high degree by the family minstrels and priests. A similar process is also evident on the coin

[235] Boyce (1979) [2001], 82; Curtis, V.S. (2007a); *ibid*. (2007b); *ibid.* (2012a); *ibid*. (2016); Errington & Curtis, V.S. (2007), 118; Invernizzi (2001), 136-141; *ibid*. (2011a), 195-196; *ibid*. (2011b), 658 ff.; Sinisi (2008); *ibid*. (2015).
[236] Boyce & Grenet (1991), 58-61; de Jong (2008), 23; *ibid*. (2015), 95.
[237] Kreyenbroek (2013), 13.
[238] On the political and religious rivalry of the Sasanian period (in particular *vis a vis* the Roman Empire), see in general Frye (1983); Shahbazi (2005) [2005]; Rose (2011), 99 ff; Kreyenbroek (2013), 13-16.
[239] de Jong (2015), 95-96.

evidence, where the splendour and power of the king are emphasised through designs including the image of the ruling king receiving a diadem from a divine figure (drawn from the Hellenistic corpus), as well as more aniconic images such as the (Varegna) bird carrying the diadem in its beak, or the solar/star and crescent moon motif.[240] Particular aspects of this symbolic language as devised on Parthian coinage were adopted into the iconography of vassal rulers; for example, the Parthian tiara decorated with astrological symbols on coins of the Persid king Vadfradad IV,[241] or or the bird carrying a diadem in its beak between a Parthian king and a group of Elymaean figures on the Hung-e Azhdar rock relief near Izeh (Khuzestan Province).[242] The diffusion of these motifs from Arsacid coinage to issues of other rulers demonstrates that Arsacid religious ideas were powerful and influential, despite there being no official "imperial religion". Symbols, such as the bird carrying the diadem, could be interpreted from different angles depending on the favoured traditions of the viewer; for example, it could be understood as *khvarnah* being transported by the Varegna bird that is an incarnation of Verethragna; or the emphasis could be the *khvarnah*-carrying Varegna bird that flies between kings and Mithra.

While Sasanian sources claim that the Arsacids' heretical policies led to the devastation of the Mazdaean religion, a lack of religious centralisation allowed the Arsacid kings to consolidate power over a region that was heavily changed by the imperial conquests of Alexander and his Seleucid successors, and the foreign gods they had brought to the East. Scholarship has recognised that interpreting the religious iconography on Arsacid coinage is difficult without identifying inscriptions. Nevertheless, it is important to consider the

[240] See Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 422-424; *ibid*. (2012a), 71-71; *ibid*. (2016), 182-185 for representations of the *khvarnah* in the coin iconography. Examples of these iconographic elements can be seen in Figures 25-31. Soudavar (2016), 6, note 16 has commented on the emphasis of the religious iconography towards the glory of the king, "Despite centuries of Hellenic domination, the depiction of gods in the Parthian and Sasanian era was symbolic, stylized, and an instrument of the glorification of the king rather than the worship of the deity."

[241] Klose & Müseler (2008), types under 4.11.2; Figure 55.

[242] Vanden Berghe (1963) pls. LII, LVI; Kawami (1987), 209-213, pls. 57-60, fig. 25; Messina, Mehrkian & Rinaudo (2014); Messina (2016). The Parthian king depicted on horseback on the left of the scene is probably Mithradates I; the four figures standing frontally to the right and dressed in Elymaean costume were added at a later date.

purpose of the images of the divine on coinage, and how they conveyed ideas to a wide cultural audience.

V. Methodology and Terminology

1. Methodological Approach

This thesis approaches the coin evidence within an overall historical framework, identifying the transitions in iconography and inscriptions and understanding these changes in the political and religious context of the period. The field of numismatics draws on a variety of disciplines such as history, archaeology, linguistics and religious studies in order to reconstruct historical context. The information gained through the study of coins and the application of further evidence (e.g. primary archaeological sources and secondary literary accouns) can help to reconstruct the political and religious ideologies across this large region.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the origins of the Parthian Empire, which date back to the middle of the 3rd century BC. The beginnings of the Arsacid dynasty as a nomadic power in the north-eastern satrapy of Parthia have been largely reconstructed from the secondary written accounts of the Gareco-Roman world. The narratives in these texts have informed our modern understanding of how this nomadic tribe transitioned into ruling power, governing over cities and settlements. These texts, however, principally reflect the reception of the Arsacid dynasty in the ancient world through the eyes of the Graeco-Roman observers. A comparative study of the literary accounts of Han dynasty in China helps to balance out the perspectives of these secondary sources from the western sphere. Furthermore, by examining the primary archaeological evidence that has been unearthed on the periphery of the so-called civilised world (as defined in the western sources), as well as material excavated from sites further afield in the nomadic sphere, a more complete picture can be drawn concerning the cultural background of these regions – namely, the Parthian satrap and the Scythian territories to the north. The primary evidence records the interactions with imperial administrations, provincial institutions and local communities (both settled and migratory) that were carried out here.

Discussion on this theme of the Arsacid nomadic origins presents various issues concerning methodology and terminology. For the latter, it is important to define what is meant by terms such as 'nomadic' and 'Scythian', which carry very vague meanings. These terms are applied to historical peoples who are difficult to trace through space and time due to their migratory nature and the resulting effect that this has on their archaeological record. See below on how the term 'nomadic' will be used in this thesis.

The methodological challenges when discussing the history of the Arsacids in Parthia concern the way that the material culture is viewed in modern scholarship. The rise of the Arsacids in the 3rd century BC and the disintegration of the Seleucid dynasty over the following two centuries mark a period of transition when Hellenism became decentralised from ideas of empire and power. This process was met with a revival of Iranian ideology under the Arsacid and Persid kings. In the examination of archaeological sites of the Hellenistic East, familiar Greek art forms have caught the attention of classical historians, and these contrast against their "exotic" geographical context far removed from the Mediterranean sphere. The approach of early scholarship has often been to isolate these Hellenistic forms, and treat them as "reified, bounded units".[243] However, a backlash against this stance later emerged in academic studies that stemmed from a postcolonial perspective. Mairs has highlighted the problematic terminology that arose from this backlash, particularly the very modern term 'hybridity' – "In particular, there is a potential clash between postcolonial hybridity's active, self-conscious negotiation between cultures (and the formation of new identities) and the efforts that we may observe in some populations of the Hellenistic Far East to defend monolithic old identities. Hybridity […] may well have been a concept that was entirely alien to the cultural outlook of the people who created and used this material culture."[244] Focusing on Greek institutions further west, Spek has considered how ethnic identities coexisted within Babylon during the Seleucid and Parthian periods. He demonstrates that Greek and Babylonian traditions remained largely

[243] Mairs (2014a), 185. See also Mairs (2011b).
[244] Mairs (2014a), 185.

separate: the Greek citizens held assembly in the theatre and maintained their own political institutions; a stoic school of philosophy flourished in the city; and athletic competitons were organised in the gymnasium. The Babylonian community likewise had its own political officials, scribal schools and temple institutions.[245] Although these "monolithic" identities were maintained (often coexisting, but sometimes in conflict), kings and ordinary people alike could move between these two cultural communities: Seleucid kings took part in Babylonian religious ceremonies, such as the New Year; while some Babylonian figures, who we know from the epigraphic cuneiform documents, adopted Greek names.[246]

How then can we understand the identity behind the so-called nomadic invaders who arrived in the Parthian satrapy in the mid-3rd century BC, and the means by which they assumed the government of sedentary spaces? The evidence and discussion presented in Chapter One attempts to answer these questions.

The remaining three chapters of this thesis focus primarily on the numismatic evidence. Chapter Two considers the sources of inspiration behind the coin types of the Arsacid kings, and how these designs were developed throughout the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. This chapter examines the ruler's portrait on the obverse side of the coins, and the iconic seated archer motif that was struck onto the reverse of the principal drachm denomination. The titles and epithets that make up the coin legend are also studied. Chapters Three and Four reflect on the meaning behind the iconography on the silver and bronze coinage, and how this visual language can be interpreted from an Iranian perspective – particularly, in terms of religious ideology and the legendary history of the Arsacid dynasty. Although these religious and legendary ideas survive today in written forms that were produced under authorities from later centuries, they preserve echoes of traditions that were observed during the Parthian period.

[245] Spek (2005).
[246] Spek (2005); see also Erikson (2011); Iossif (2011); Strootman (2011b); *ibid*. (2013).

Research based on coinage must address two competing models through which this evidence is interpreted by modern numismatists: the propaganda model and the function model.[247] These terms can be defined as such: 'propaganda' being when the factors driving coin production propagate the "aspirations and claims of [a] regime" and 'function' being when the "same [coin] design was retained for long periods to maintain public confidence and implicitly offer reassurance about the unchanging quality of the coinage."[248] Scholars working within the numismatic discipline have, at large, converged around these two models, considering them to be relevant lenses through which to interpret coin iconography and inscriptions. However, Bracey has recently challenged this theoretical framework, arguing that these general models cannot be assumed to be satisfactory explanations for all coin design.[249]As will be shown, these models were defined and developed using coin evidence that is culturally removed from Parthia. Therefore, a more nuanced approach to understanding the intentions behind Parthian coin design must be observed.

The theory that coin iconography was incentivised by propaganda stems from discussions based exclusively on Roman coinage.[250] In addition, this theoretical model was popularised during the 19th century amid the aggressive propaganda campaigns of World War I and II. In 1917, Mattingly was first to propose that the designs executed on Roman coinage were ideologically linked with the "modern campaigns of persuasion which marked the waging of intellectual war alongside military campaigns."[251] In this frame of mind, rapid changes in late Republican and early Imperial Roman coin design were understood as expressions of the severe political turbulence unfolding during this period: while the coins' obverse displayed a portrait of the issuing authority, the reverse varied tremendously from assertions of an authority's virtues, victories and public works, political slogans and divine endorsements,

[247] Cribb (2009), 498-507; Bracey (forthcoming). Note, Burnett (1991), 29-41 examines these models using different terminology: 'monetary', which corresponds to 'function', and 'political' corresponding to 'propaganda'.
[248] Burnett (1991), 37 and 30.
[249] Bracey (forthcoming).
[250] Bracey (forthcoming); Cribb (2009), 500-502.
[251] Cribb (2009), 500 in summary of Mattingly (1917).

magistrates and institutions of a city, among many other strategic designs.[252] The propaganda model has relied on the assumption that coin design was considered by ancient authorities as an effective form of mass media. It is important not to project these conclusions onto coinage that was struck in other geographic regions and political contexts. Bracey has criticised such an approach, stating that "it is always possible to find a 'message' to explain an image", and unfortunately, "that message becomes [an interpolated] statement about historical events."[253] Naturally, a backlash against the exclusive use of this model emerged with the recognition that Rome was a unique case study.[254]

In contrast, the function model highlights the practical role of coinage in occurrences of trade and exchange. Political and religious power symbols worked into the design lent authority to the coin so that it may be accepted as an authentic issue by any user of the currency. In comparison to the propaganda model, this interpretation of ancient coinage appears to render the objects as empty of meaning. However, the function model, in fact, argues that a coin's design was "central to the transformation of coinage into money."[255] Symbols implemented on coinage served to confirm the engrained rhetoric of an imperial power.[256] In the case of Parthia, the grand titles and epithets on coinage served to identify the king as the highest authority. The formulaic and (by later periods) unchanging assembly of these titles and epithets emphasised the continuation in the dynastic line of power. Having this official authority marked onto the coins allowed populations to trust that they were using coins manufactured to specific weights and metal content, and hence legal tender. This model presupposes that any changes to the coin design were the minimum required in order to keep the currency up to date with the portrait of the current ruler and his titles. In some cases, minor changes to a coin's design

[252] Burnett 1991, 30-31. Cribb (2009), 502 notes that although these changes are labelled as acts of propaganda, it should be remembered that this is generally not the kind of propaganda implemented in the extreme political climate of the World Wars, and which may be defined "a systematic programme for the orchestration of public opinion." In many cases, the design of a coin has simply been altered in order to inform the users of certain changes to the political order.
[253] Bracey (forthcoming).
[254] Burnett (1991), 38.
[255] Bracey (forthcoming).
[256] Bracey (forthcoming).

reflect the internal administration of a mint and its methods to distinguish between series of coins, or the production of various work stations operating within the same mint. This can be seen on coins of Mithradates II, for example, where a star is depicted on the king's costume on some issues, but not on other contemporary issues from the same mint.[257] By these means, trust between the issuer and the user of the coins was maintained, and the state's economy could be administrated effectively.

Despite these dominant theoretical arguments, an interpretive model for the case of Parthian coinage remains to be developed fully. It is fundamental that Parthia's coinage is examined on its own terms and from an appropriate cultural perspective, as has been outlined and emphasised in discussions above. Although functional characteristics are apparent in the design of Parthian coinage (such as the star control mark on the king's costume), numismatists must also consider how the mints made these functional decisions under the aegis of the Arsacid king. Moreover, it is important to think about how the political and cultural landscape of this period affected decisions to do with coin design and production. During the early Parthian period, the Arsacid kings conquered new territories in Iran and Mesopotamia, and absorbed their mints into their growing bureaucracy – mints that had been established under the Seleucid administration. The maintenance of Hellenistic elements in the denominations and coin iconography of the Arsacid kings does not necessarily indicate that the new rulers were adopting a Hellensitic ideology, but perhaps that the mints were continuing to function as they had done under the previous regime.

Following the consolidation of the Parthian Empire under Mithradates II, a stronger sense of Arsacid identity had developed within the coin iconography. Particular elements from Mithradates II's coinage (such as the depiction of the decorated Parthian costume on the obverse portrait) were adopted by vassal kings and neighbouring ruler on their own coin issues. Thus, the minting customs that had been established under the Seleucids across the region were

[257] Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

now largely replaced by a new Parthian imperial model (these developments are outlined further in Chapter Two). Later in the middle of the 1st century BC, when dynastic feuds plagued the Arsacid House and when the rivalry between Parthian and Rome was becoming more acute, Arsacid coin iconography developed towards a new model in order to highlight the importance of the king. On tetradrachms minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris during this period, the Arsacid king was shown on both the obverse and reverse sides of the coinage; on these new reverse types, the king was often shown in the presence of a goddess receiving symbols of kingship and victory (see Chapter Three). Despite the general conservative trend in Parthian coin design,[258] it is clear that the Parthian king periodically had reason to redefine his image according to changing political needs.

Studies on Parthian coinage must focus on untangling the various strands of influence acting upon its design, whether these are to do with propaganda, function or some other underlying reason. These considerations will highlight whether changes in the coin iconography or inscriptions were motivated by external or internal factors - that is, by the political and military aggression of foreign powers, or by the Arsacids' own triumphs, administrative needs or dynastic turmoils.

2. Terminology

What is meant by 'Political?'

While the coinage of the Arsacid dynasty presents an image of autocratic power (with the king's portrait struck on the obverse, and his titles and epithets framing the reverse design), it is evident that the king's will did not always determine how coinage was produced. Function and adaptability often played a significant role in the decisions concerning what to strike on a coin. Beneath the surface of their monocratic image, the Arsacid dynasty dealt with the

[258] Sinisi (2008), 244, "… in the Parthian case, despite the obvious typological innovations, there is no break of production continuity between the Greeks and their Iranian successors, the Parthian coinage evolving from gradual modifications to the Seleucid one."

complicated dynamics of a heterogeneous empire filled with multiple political agents – these included vassal kings, rivals to the Arsacid throne, religious insitutions, military generals, administrative officials and aristocratic supporters.[259] Whether this political system should be viewed as inherently weak has been debated.[260]

In the eyes of its Sasanian critics, the Parthian Empire was a politically fragmented state. By tolerating a number of petty kings, the Arsacid dynasty had abandoned the principle of "one lordship"; de Jong notes, however, that the Sasanians projected this political ideology of "one lordship" ("the ideal situation in which all Iranian were ruled by a single king") onto their defeated predecessors in order to justify the necessity for their destruction.[261] The political administration of the Parthian Empire can perhaps be compared to that of the Achaemenid kings, who also permitted provincial governors to strike their own coinage in their individual satrapies. Like the Arsacid kings, these Achaemenids also endured periods of dynastic turmoil and internal revolt. Despite these issues, Root has described the strengths of the Achaemenids' political policy: "The central imperial policy of the Achaemenids exerted its powerful force in a direction that was dynamic - but not at all in the sense of aiming toward a goal of cultural pan-Persianism. Its pragmatic goals involved military power and control of vast resources and wealth. Its symbolic methods of facilitating these goals involved a rhetoric of unity in the maintenance and even nourishment of cultural diversity."[262]

The coin evidence from Parthia demonstrates a similar political structure, in which the king's absolute power was not necessarily exercised over decisions which could be made by other administrative bodies. In fact, a certain amount of autonomy within the empire's mints allowed for a better functioning system that benefited the greatest number of people. This king's absolute power, and the power of other political agents within the Parthian

[259] Schmitt (1983), 197-205.
[260] See recently Engels' (2011) discussion of the feudalistic character of the Parthian Empire.
[261] de Jong (2008), 19.
[262] Root (1991), 6.

Empire (whether vassal rulers, mint officials, etc.) to influence coin design were not mutually exclusive, but underline the intricacies that must be taken into account in this examination of Arsacid political ideology.

What is meant by Religious?

Two points must be made with regard to the term 'religion' as it is used in this thesis: firstly, although a consciousness of Hellenistic religion must be maintained throughout this research on coin design, the main religious undercurrents that will be examined will be from Iranian traditions. This is not to ignore the influence of Hellenism in an empire which inherited large populations of ethnic Greeks and was also visibly inspired by their predecessor's coin artistry, but rather to focus on the under-examined Iranian religious perspective.

Secondly, it is important to keep in mind the various issues concerning the study of Iranian religion during the Parthian period, when rituals were principally performed orally. The a-historical and non-absolute nature of the Mazdaen religion of this period has been outlined in the discussion above. It is generally accepted that the religion of the Parthians cannot be easily measured against the canonised religion that emerged out of the Persid tradition centuries after the demise of the Arsacid dynasty (and which underlines the written version of the *Avesta* that survives today). Similar issues are presented in studies of Achaemend religion. Henkelman calls for a "model that stresses a basic unity while admitting diversity and evolutionary development"; however, "as a result of the latter, the definition of 'Zoroastrianism' is becoming wider in recent syntheses. The drawback of this is that a statement like 'the Achaemenids were Zoroastrians' tends to become meaningless."[263] Zaehner similarly notes, "Unless we are careful to define our terms, we cannot speak of Zoroastrianism as a single religion."[264]

[263] Henkelman (2005), 142.
[264] Zaehner (1961), 22.

In this thesis, the term 'Zoroastrianism' has been avoided in order to maintain a separation from the more fixed Zoroastrian religion of the Sasanian period. Instead, the religion of the Arsacid kings is generally described as 'Mazdaean'. Although the research aims of this thesis partly lie in extracting Iranian religious meaning from Parthian coin design, this must be done with caution in order not to create the impression of a systematised set of beliefs. It should be stated that any religious meaning mined from the coinage is demonstrative of ideological undercurrents in Parthian culture, and moreover, ideological undercurrents that specifically relate to kingship. Since the Arsacids did not enforce a centralised religion across the many peoples of their empire, the role of the Arsacids' personal religion served to support their legitimacy as rulers when incorporated into coins that were handled by members of their royal court, by subjects within the empire, and perhaps by populations beyond Parthia's frontiers.

What is meant by 'nomadic'?

The terms 'nomadic' and 'Scythian' are often used in modern scholarship to describe the numerous migratory tribes across the Eurasian steppe, from the north of the Black Sea to the Altai Mountains. These terms, however, easily misrepresent the Eurasian steppe as a homogenous group, and whitewash the complex political, cultural and economic structures that bound individual tribes to their neighbours, both 'nomadic' and 'settled'.[265] These designated terms have been passed down to modern scholarship from ancient Greek sources (for example, *νομάδες* 'nomads' is used liberally in Herodotus).[266] They have, moreover, carried with them a sense of inferiority to the settled civilisations of the Persian and Greek empires. For example, Aristotle claims that the idlest of all men are nomads since they must roam tethered to their herds, rather than enjoy cultivated land and its produce.[267] Also outside his class of civilised, settled cultivators, Aristotle lists hunting and brigandage as other modes of

[265] See, for example, Dalton (1905), 12, "The nomadic tribes of the old world formed a homogeneous community dispersed through a broad zone".
[266] E.g. Herodotus, 1.15, 1.125 & 7.85.
[267] Aristotle, *Politics*, 1256a.31.

living – both of which were often attached to the Graeco-Roman understanding of the Scythian peoples. The Achaemenids had their own term for the Iranian-speaking tribes that inhabited the Central Asian steppe, and designated these people as the 'Saka' (sometimes differentiated, for example, as the *saka tigraxauda* 'pointed cap', *saka haumavarga* 'haoma placing', etc.). In Chinese literature, the Han historian Sima Qian principally characterises the tribal groups as vulgar and wandering nations, who migrate with their livestock; whilst settled populations are identified by their agricultural practices.[268]

In speaking of the Arsacids and their Scythian Parni/Aparni ancestors, it is difficult to define what exactly is meant by the Graeco-Roman authors. No specific archaeological record exists for this tribe, and they are known primarily from secondary written sources. This is generally the case for many of the migrating tribes, in that specific styles of material culture cannot be prescribed to individual groups since they demonstrate a cultural "continuum" rather than "divide".[269] From the Graeco-Roman authors, we learn that the Parni migrated from further afield (perhaps north of the Caspian Sea) to the north-eastern fringes of the Seleucid Empire. They were reportedly part of a federation of tribes known as the Dahae, and so presumably held significant political, cultural and economic ties with neighbouring tribes. The desert delimited their sphere, according to Justin's account (specifically, the Karakum desert of modern Turkmenistan).[270] However, this region was bordered by the oasis kingdom of Chorasmia to the north-west, and the Parthian and Hyrcanian satrapies to the south – allowing the Dahae-Parni to dominate traffic between these more centralised regions.[271] The Parni were, most likely, very aware of political events and turmoil unfolding in the Seleucid-Parthian satrapy, if not in the Seleucid Empire at large.[272] Archaeological sites and material suggest that these tribal groups may be classified as nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled in different contexts, and can be generally characterised by seasonal pastoral

[268] For example, *Shiji*, 123.6, 10, in which the nomadic Great Yuezhi are compared to the people of Dayuan (modern Fergana, Uzbekistan), who cultivate the land with rice and wheat.
[269] Mairs (2014a), 159.
[270] Justin, 41.1.10.
[271] Vogelsang (1993) [2011]; Betts (2006).
[272] Gaslain (2016), 4.

movements as well as contact with agricultural settlements (especially along important natural resources, such as waterways). They may have been affiliated with a centralised tribal confederacy, and archaeological evidence suggests that friendly relations with neighbouring tribes must have occurred. However, conflict within and between tribes was also a reality.[273] Chapter One discusses the nature of the Arsacids' Parni ancestors, particularly as they are represented in the Graeco-Roman sources, in greater detail.

[273] Betts (2006), 133-155 provides an overview of the migrations of the Scythian/Saka over the 1st millennium BC, as well as the issues in defining these so-called nomadic groups.

- Chapter One -

FROM DAHAE-PARNI TO PARTHIANS

Literary and Archaeological Sources for the Origins of the Arsacids

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The enigmatic origins of the Arsacid kingdom have been described in Graeco-Roman literature as the result of a nomadic invasion by the Parni or Aparni tribe into the Seleucid satrapy of Parthia, taking place sometime in the mid-3rd century BC. This warring movement from the cold arid climate of the Karakum Desert to the Parthian settlements scattered across southern Turkmenistan and northern Khorasan was headed by the dynastic founder, Arsaces I, and led to the disposal of the reigning satrap known to us as Andragoras.[274] By the end of the 3rd century BC, Arsaces I and his heir, Arsaces II, had established several strongholds in Parthia and neighbouring Hyrcania, and conquered the major cities of Nisa and Hecatompylos.[275] The consolidation of the new Arsacid state marked the beginning of the end of Seleucid command in the north-east, and introduced a new kind of ruler into the palaces of the conquered cities. According to the written sources of the Graeco-Roman world, this new Arsacid kingdom represented a burgeoning barbaric and despotic power in the East.

Lack of an extensive written account by a contemporary Arsacid subject has forced scholarship to rely principally on the accounts of the Graeco-Roman

[274] Justin, 41.4.7; Hill (1922), 193. In the years leading up to Arsaces I's invasion of Parthia, Andragoras had asserted his own authority in the satrapy, and struck gold and silver coinage in his own name (Figure 1). The degree to which he had gained independence from his Seleucid overlord, however, remains unknown. A Greek inscription from Hyrcania (modern Gorgan) mentions a certain Andragoras who served in some official capacity under Antiochus I and his queen Stratonike, and dates no later than 266 BC. This is perhaps the same Andragoras who served as the satrap of Parthia in the mid-3rd century BC; see Robert (1960); Frye (1985) [2011]; Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 7. On the Persian identity of Andragoras, see Justin, 12.4.12, who wrote (in a condensed sequence of events) that Alexander had given the governorship of Parthia to a noble Persian named Andragoras. In light of this text, Ghirshman (1974), 7 has interpreted the name of Andragoras as a Greek version of the Iranian Narisanka (Old Persian) or *Nairyō.saŋha-* (Avestan); this hypothesis, however, is disputed by Wolski (1975).

[275] Olbrycht (2015a).

historians and geographers, who observed the Parthian Empire with suspicion and intrigue from afar. Contemporary and later Chinese sources have received significantly less scholarly attention.[276] However, modern archaeological studies based around the Oxus River basin, the Aral and Caspian Seas, and the southern Ural Mountains have demonstrated the enduring links between these regions since the time of the Achaemenid Empire. This aspect has generally gone unnoticed in Parthian history despite the implications it has for the Arsacid dynasty's developing ideology, political alliances and cultural contact with the so-called nomadic world beyond Parthia's borders.[277] For Mithradates II, who is perhaps best known in the western sources for establishing the Parthian Empire's western frontier with Rome at the Euphrates in c. 96 BC, little is known of this king's eastern activity that led to the formalisation of trade routes with Central Asia and China. In this chapter, the surviving written sources will be examined and scrutinised alongside current archaeological material in order to distinguish rhetoric from reality, and to more fully understand the contact that occurred between the migratory nomadic world and the organised imperial sphere.

I. Written Accounts of the Classical Western and Chinese Spheres

1. Greek and Roman

Justin's 2nd century history (based on Pompeius Trogus' work of the 1st century BC) remarks that the Arsacids materialised as an obscure group of Scythian exiles, who drifted around as a horde with no name or identity - exemplified by his false etymology of the word 'Parthian', which he claims

[276] Wang, T. (2007), 87-88.

[277] Olbrycht (2015b), 270 notes "The majority of scholars of early Parthia have not paid much attention to the migration of the steppe peoples." A similar argument is given by Stride, Rondelli & Mantellini (2009), 83 concerning studies on the early medieval period, "This is due both to the nature of archaeological evidence (which privileges evidence of permanent sites) and to the division of our discipline between specialists of the pastoral nomadic world and specialists of the sedentary agricultural world. Whereas the former emphasise the extreme rarity of pure nomadic pastroralism, with most pastoralists being semi-nomadic and often part-time agriculturalists, the latter usually simply consider the pastoral nomadic world as an exogenous factor." The coexistence of these two groups in ancient Iran and the wider region is addressed in greater detail throughout this chapter.

means 'exile' in the language of the Scythians.[278] After their expulsion from Scythia, the horde furtively occupied the barren landscape between the Hyrcanians, Dahae, Arei, Sparni and Margianae; eventually, they established firm control over the region and continued to harass their neighbours from this seat of power.[279] The early Arsacid rulers continued to live according to a nomadic lifestyle - hunting their meals, fixed to their mounts, and using precious metals solely to adorn their portable weapons.[280] They abided by superstition, Justin claims, and worshiped rivers (as opposed to a pantheon of personified deities).[281] The Roman historian's description of the Arsacids' character highlights their rough nature, their love of commotion, instinct for action over diplomacy, and fear of their despotic chiefs.[282] Moreover, he states that they could not keep to their promises unless the outcome was profitable to them, demonstrating their unruly sense of conduct and law. This perception of the Arsacid-occupied Parthian state stands in stark contrast to the civilised neighbouring kingdom of Graeco-Bactria, which was said to be rich in opulence and filled with a thousand cities.[283]

Strabo's account offers similar statements about the early Arsacids and their social, cultural and political behaviour. He frames his description of this part of the world in terms of the lands that are *oikoumene* ('inhabited', from *oikos*, a societal unit within a civilised community), and those that are *aoiketos* ('uninhabited', or having an absence of *oikos*).[284] A similar contrast is made between lands and populations considered to be *hemeros* ('cultivated' or 'civilised'), and those places and peoples who are *agrios* ('untamed' or 'savage').[285] These kinds of binary opposition are present throughout Strabo's geographic account of the East. The chaos of the barbaric world is underlined by

[278] Justin, 41.1.1-2. Rather, the name for this satrapy derives from the Old Persian *Parthava*, and was known as Parthyena under the Seleucids.
[279] The names of these groups of people vary between manuscript editions; other readings include '*areos et sparthanos*' and '*areos et hypartanos*'; Arnaud-Lindet (2003), 160.
[280] Justin, 41.3.3-4, 41.2.10.
[281] Justin, 41.3.6.
[282] Justin, 41.3.7-10.
[283] Justin, 41.1.8; also Strabo, 15.1.3.
[284] E.g. Strabo, 11.11.7, 11.7.2, 11.6.1.
[285] E.g. Strabo, 11.8.7, 11.14.4. See also Strabo, 13.1.25 where the author refrences Aristotle's classification of mankind in *Politics*, 1.1256a.31.

the disorienting list of tribe names, alliances, and movements of peoples across the steppe region over an unspecified period of time. The Scythian Arsaces I, Strabo explains, was a member of the Aparni tribe in the region of the Ochus River (modern Panj, Tajikistan); and the Aparni were one of several scattered tribes that were interconnected under the Dahae confederation across the steppe.[286] To the east of the Dahae lived the Massagetae and Saka tribes, as well as their allies the Attasii, Chorasmii and Apasiacae; beyond, the Arachoti and the Bactrians dwelled on the western side of the Oxus River (modern Amu Darya).[287] Further east were the Sogdians, and beyond the Jaxartes River (modern Syr Darya) was where the Asii, Pasiani, Tochari and Sacarauli had inhabited until their southward migration into Bactria.[288] Another dozen tribes are listed around the shores of the Caspian Sea. Strabo further notes a variation in the origin story of Arsaces I, which states that he first attempted his coup in Bactria, before being chased into neighbouring Parthia by the local ruler Diodotus.[289] Gaslain has suggested that Arsaces I's presence in Bactria in this version of the narrative may indicate that he was already established as a local elite in the Seleucid Upper Satrapies as he attempted his revolution - this would explain his ease in raising a local army, building fortifications, striking coinage and brokering a treaty with Diodotus in Bactria.[290] However, the idea in western sources behind Arsaces I's beginnings in Bactria may also have arisen as a thematic extension of the nomadic invasions that were made into this region, and which eventually instigated the collapse of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom from the 130s BC.

While Strabo himself made observations about the Parthian world in the 1st centuries BC and AD, his conclusions partly drew on prior knowledge compiled by Eratosthenses in the 3rd century BC, when inter-tribal alliances and

[286] Strabo, 11.9.2-3. Other tribes within the Dahae alliance, according to Strabo's text, include the Xandii and Parii, who roamed further away above Lake Maeotis (the modern Sea of Azov in the Ukraine/Russia).
[287] Strabo, 11.8.8.
[288] Strabo, 11.8.2.
[289] Strabo, 11.9.3. A similar account is found in Arrian (2nd century AD) *Parthica*, F30-31 (frg. 1 Roos), who claims that Arsaces I and his brother Tiridates were Scythian by origin, and had been satraps of Bactria on the eve of their revolt in the mid-3rd century BC.
[290] Gaslain (2016), 4.

their spheres of power looked rather different.[291] Another authority for the Scythian origins of Arsaces I came from Apollodorus, a 2nd/1st century BC historian from the Parthian-ruled Greek city of Artemita in Apolloniatis (in the east of modern Iraq), and whose work *Parthica* is now lost.[292] Strabo himself acknowledges the inconsistencies in his various sources, and this affirms the difficulties in dealing with various centuries of Scythian history with no identifiable centres of settlement and no first-hand written accounts from the region.[293] How these varied peoples fit into the topography of ancient Iran and the steppe (with the only landmarks mentioned being the major rivers) remains vague.

Though varied in name and territory, the individual peoples within Strabo's amalgamation of tribes are regularly reduced to the same description: more inclined to piracy and looting instead of agriculture and a settled, civic lifestyle.[294] Parallel to Justin's account, Strabo paints a picture of the early Arsacids as a lawless society, profiting for themselves in raids rather than loyally serving a state or government. The people of Hyrcania and Parthia were forced to pay tribute to the nomads who roamed in the desolate plains to the north of these satrapies. Fighting readily broke out, the geographer claims, when agreements were breached between the nomads and their tormented neighbours. Strabo writes that the customs of the Arsacids remained barbaric and Scythian, even after their kingdom had expanded into an empire to rival Rome. Determined to explain how such base rulers achieved this success, he states that the barbaric and bellicose mores of the Arsacids helped to impose their rule over countries of differing cultures.[295]

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[291] Mairs (2006), 6; *ibid*. (2014a), 152 remarks on how the western sources refer to peoples and tribes in these regions, rather than to fixed geographic territories; see also Betts (2006). Olbrycht (2015b), 269-271 attempts to reconstruct some of these tribal reorganisations and movements between the fall of the Achaemenids in 330 BC and the consolidation of the Seleucid Empire some decades later.

[292] Chaumont (1986) [2011].

[293] For example concerning the origins of Arsaces I in the passage 11.9.3, *οὐ πάνυ δ' ὠμολόγηται Δάας εἶναί* "but it is not altogether agreed upon…"

[294] For example, Strabo, 11.7.1, 11.8.3.

[295] Strabo, 11.9.2.

Writing in the 1st century AD, Pliny the Elder similarly compiled a list of tribes using information collected by the contemporary Roman general Corbulo (AD 7-67) during Rome's Armenian campaigns, as well as earlier accounts from those who had marched eastwards with Alexander the Great in the late 4th century BC.[296] In his interest to record the history and localities of these varied peoples, Pliny openly addresses the discrepancies between his sources due to the copious tribal names and their migratory habits. The character of the Parthians is, nevertheless, confidently equated to that of the Scythians: "the multitude of these [Scythian] populations is innumerable, and in their habits they compare to the Parthians. The best known of these are the Sacae, the Massagetae, the Dahae, the Essedones […]".[297] Pliny may have intended to make sense of Rome's brutal defeat at Carrhae by means of comparing the Parthian rivals to the savagery of the Scythians that had been made so famous in the works of his predecessors. Indeed, Pliny states that the Romans who had survived Carrhae were made captive and marched to the oasis city of Merv (known to the author as Alexandria, and later Antiochia, in Margiana); here they remained surrounded by derest lands, as well as unfamiliar and uncivilised tribes.[298] Under the surface of Pliny's account concerning Rome's great rival, however, the author hints at the wider cultural crossover in the north-eastern regions, as well as the varied communities that overlapped in Parthia itself. He contrasts the centre of the Parthian province filled with the major cities of Hecatompylos, Arsace and Nisa with the more distant Parthians who are known as nomads.[299]

The works of these various authors present the modern reader with similar perspectives of a changing world. Strabo's family held an important position in the court of Mithradates VI of Pontus, who claimed ancestry from the Achaemenids Cyrus and Darius, as well as the generals of Alexander the Great, particularly Seleucus I. With Pompey's victory over Pontus in 66/65 BC, Strabo's family shifted its allegiance to Rome. Strabo witnessed the rise of

[296] Pliny the Elder, 6.15, 6.18-19.
[297] Pliny the Elder, 6.19, see also 6.29.
[298] Pliny the Elder, 6.18.
[299] Pliny the Elder, 6.29.

Roman dictators in the west, followed by the rise of Roman emperors soon after; while in the east, the Parthian kings were steadily increasing their sphere of influence and encroaching on Rome's territorial interests. Nicolet has noted that Strabo's Geography was very political in its concept, acting as a "great inventory of everything" that a (Roman) statesman may wish to know in his dealings both amicable and hostile with other nations, including the resources found there, their economy, trade, tribute, production, consumption, and historical notations.[300] These important aspects were often the driving force behind Roman expansion.

The life of Pompeius Trogus (Justin's principal source) was similarly marked by Pompey's military campaigns: his name was inherited from his grandfather, who had served under the Roman general in a previous war. Trogus also lived to see the end of the Roman Republic and the beginning of the imperial period. He flourished during the reign of Augustus and witnessed the propaganda war of the Roman Emperor against his Parthian adversaries. Justin's epitome captured the intensification of imperial rivalry between Rome and Parthia, and served to contrast the stories of two superpowers in collision. This rivalry stretched beyond military campaigns, and highlighted the incompatible customs, ideology and political institutions of the Parthian enemy. During Justin's lifetime, Roman-Parthian hostilities had worsened amid further military campaigns carried out between the two empires. The experiences and biases of figures involved in these wars (such as the general Corbulo who strongly informed Pliny's views) undoubtedly coloured the historical narrative that today's scholars look to when examining Parthia's rise to power.

An account from a later period demonstrates that the bitter Roman-Parthian wars, which were fought across Pontus, Armenia, Adiabene and Mesopotamia until AD 217, continued to affect the way in which the Parthians were received in Roman history. Writing in the 4th century AD, Ammianus Marcellinus (who identified as a Greek from Rome's eastern empire and as a soldier) described Arsaces I as a man of obscure birth who spent his youth as a

[300] Nicolet (1991), 73-74.

bandit chief, but who rose to great heights when he conquered neighbouring territories through any means necessary, namely *metus* 'fear', *castra* 'military occupation', and *civitates* '[regard for] the laws of the [subject] cities'.[301] His entry into the wider world beyond his tribal origins, Ammianus claims, to some extent improved his aspirations and ideals. These details – respect for the laws of subject cities and a superior sense of ideals – differentiate this account from the earlier works of Strabo and Justin, though it is tinged with the same comparison of base nomadic customs to the high culture of the western sphere. Ammianus' viewpoint, however, may reflect developments in the Arsacids' concept of kingship: from the 1st century BC, royal epithets became increasingly centred around claims of the Arsacid King of Kings being 'Just' or 'Righteous' (*ΔΙΚΑΙΟΣ*), a 'Benefactor' (*ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ*), and a 'Philhellene' (*ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ*).[302] Tolerance for Greek customs and institutions was indeed largely practiced during the Parthian period. The *Astronomical Diaries* record that a Greek community of *politai* ('citizens') continued to meet during this period in Babylon's Greek theatre, and it abided by its own constitution. The Arsacid king communicated with and addressed this Greek institution, evidenced by statements in the tablets that claim letters sent by the king were read out in the theatre.[303] In return for their loyalty to the supreme power of the Arsacid dynasty, this community of Greeks was permitted by the Arsacid king to internally administrate itself according to its own laws.

The native Parthians of Ammianus' account are characterised as brutes who enjoy waging wars, and who lived by these means in the Parthian

[301] Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.2-6.

[302] These epithets appear first on S29 drachms that are attributed to Mithradates II in Sellwood (1980). However, recent studies have re-attributed this coin type to a successor of Mithradates II, probably Gotarzes I (c. 91-87 BC); see Assar (2005), 53-55; Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018). These epithets held strong resonances in the Greek language: Pluatrch, in *Anthony*, 23.2, uses the descriptive term "Philhellene' when talking about the Roman Anthony, who he states indulged in Greek culture and custom, including literary discussions, athletic games and religious rites. He continues: "[…] in his judicial decisions he was fair, and was glad to be called a Philhellene […] and to the city [of Athens] he gave very many gifts." This description suggests that being a 'Philhellene' was more than just an appreciation of Greek culture, but emcompassed actions that upheld the judicial laws of Greek communities and that benefited their community in a financial sense. Likewise, the epithet *Euergetes* or 'Benefactor' describes, according to the Oxford Classical Dictionary, "a socio-political phenomenon of voluntary gift-giving to the ancient community […] who saw such philanthropy as a cardinal virtue of rulers"; see OCD, 566.

[303] See Spek's recent (2005) appraisal of the Babylonian Greek community living under Parthian rule.

heartland - this he described as the *pagi* 'countryside' or 'land outside the city'.[304] This is in contrast to the walled, urban centres of Persis described by Ammianus in a preceding chapter. The Scythian ancestors of Arsaces I, he adds, had similarly extended their territory greatly through lawless, impudent attacks until they were stopped by various campaigns carried out by the Achaemenid Persian kings.[305] When Ammianus was writing his history of the region, the Sasanians had by now arisen in Persis - the former heartland of the Persian kings - and similarly defeated the "barbarian" Arsacids. Ammianus' view of the Parthians demonstrates that he drew heavily on the perceptions of earlier western writers, as well as the bitter history surrounding the Roman-Parthian wars. Perhaps influenced by Sasanian propaganda of the time, he also makes a contrast between the civilised order instilled in the cities of Old Persia, and the Parthians' new political order in the northeast. His views present the rise and decline of the Arsacid dynasty as a detatched episode in history, neither part of the Hellenistic world nor the later Sasanian period. However, this attitude masks the more fluid processes that occurred within transitions of power, particularly during the dynastic shift from the Arsacids to the Sasanians.[306]

Alongside the historical events that are narrated in these commentaries, texts of the Greek and Roman worlds also provide interesting perspectives on the boundaries of the Parthian Empire, particularly on the north-eastern border where Arsaces I launched his invasion. The shifting heartland and border regions of the Parthian Empire across time demonstrate how the dynasty interacted with the nomadic world during its early history and in later centuries. The *Parthian Stations* of Isidore of Charax, a geographer of the 1st century BC and AD who is thought to have come from the Parthian vassal kingdom of Characene (modern southern Iraq), describes in part the overland routes that connected the cities and villages from Antioch to India.[307] Notably in the region

[304] Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.44.
[305] Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.6.7.
[306] Olbrycht (2016) writes in greater detail on the close dynastic relationship between these two ruling houses.
[307] Although the active dates of this geographer and the assumption that he came from Characene imply that he was a Parthian subject, his account was completed in Greek and is thought to have drawn from an earlier work of the Hellenistic world. Isidore demonstrates some knowledge of

of Astauena (southern Kopet Dagh range), Isidore states that a dynastic Arsacid fire is guarded at the city of Assak; beyond in Parthia, the royal tombs as well as the city of Nisa can be found. From Parthia, a traveller would pass eastwards through Apauarcticena and Margiana, and then turn southwards to Aria and Drangiana, to Sakastan ('the land of the Saka') and its capital Sigal, and to Arachosia - known as 'White India' to the Parthians and no doubt a source of ivory for prestige objects, such as the ivory rhytons discovered at Parthian Nisa.[308] The Parthian Empire, Isidore claims, extended to the borders of these eastern regions.

This account reflects the importance of Parthia (the satrapy) and its surrounding regions in royal ceremony and burials during this period. Whilst archaeologists have not yet found evidence of the dynastic flame from ancient Assak or of the royal tombs in Parthia, the archaeological record from the site of Old Nisa (mostly dated to the 1st centuries BC and AD) determines this region's significance as a ceremonial centre at the time of Isidore's writing. However, in what survives of the fragmentary *Parthian Stations*, there is no mention of any external roads leading out of Parthia into Scythian or Bactrian territory, even though these routes must have existed. For example, Sinatruces is known to have lived amongst the Scythian Sacaraucae before he contended the Arsacid throne in late 90s or early 80s BC, and he adopted Scythian-style stag protomes on the royal tiara of his coin portraits;[309] treasures ornamented with Scythian decorative elements have been excavated at the Parthian site of Old Nisa in southern Turkmenistan, as well as ivory rhytons and furniture legs that are similar to objects found in Bactrian Ai Khanoum.[310] In addition, no indication of overland contact with the Chinese Han is given in Isidore's account, though this was established under Mithradates II in the late 2nd century BC.[311] Consequently,

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Aramaic in his translations of Semitic toponyms from the western reaches of the Parthian stations; see Schoff (1914), 17-18; Schmitt (2007) [2012].

[308] Isidore of Charax, §11-19.

[309] Lucian Macrobii, §15. This feature can be seen on S33 drachm and bronze coin types, which have been re-attributed to this king since Sellwood's 1980 catalogue; see Assar (2006a), 55-62.

[310] Bernard (1970a); Curtis, V.S. (1996).

[311] The eastern portion of the Parthian stations has been noted to be much sparser in information than the western half, particularly from Media eastwards. This may be due to the author's lesser

the true reaches of Parthia's northern and eastern networks during this period are lost to the modern reader.

By the time of Pliny the Elder's *Natural History* (c. AD 77) and Ptolemy's *Geography* (c. AD 150), the borders within the Parthian Empire had changed. The region of Parthia Proper shifted southwards, while Hyrcania was positioned above it. Hyrcania's northern boundary can be traced from the banks of the Hyrcanian (Caspian) Sea running eastwards along the Cronus (Kopet Dagh) Mountains, and reaching Margiana to the east.[312] Margiana was populated by various cities and towns that flourished along the Margus River (modern Murghab), providing a junction between the upper Oxus, Chorasmia and Transoxiana.[313] The names of the tribes bordering these routes echo those of earlier Graeco-Roman texts - namely the Massagetae, Parni and Dahae. The changing boundaries of these regions have been highlighted by various scholars: Olbrycht has described the decline of northern Parthia from the mid-1st century AD following the defeat of the Sinatrucid line of the Arsacid family and the rise of a new dominant branch of the dynasty in Media Atropatene; while Ghodrat-Dizaji notes that the region of Parthia Proper had shifted even further towards the central Iranian Plateau by the Sasanian period.[314] By examining these sources, it can be seen how the Parthian Empire's central regions of power shifted further away from the tribal, nomadic world from the 1st century AD. These changes perhaps allowed the Arsacids' nomadic origins to slip further

knowledge of this part of the empire, or that of earlier sources from which Isidore drew his account; Walser (1985), 147; Daffinà (1967), 87-106.

[312] Pliny the Elder, 6.29; Ptolemy, 6.9.

[313] Pliny the Elder, 6.18; Ptolemy, 6.10.

[314] Olbrycht (2015a), 122; Ghodrat-Dizaji (2016). While Old Nisa flourished in the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, later evidence suggests that the citadel fell into decline by the 1st century AD, and was subsequently devastated by Vardanes I in the AD 40s. Notably, the number of ostraca that date to this period of turmoil in Nisa diminishes. In the AD 50s, Vologases I fought against the Dahae in Hyrcania, and then against the Alans some decades later; Olbrycht (1997a); *ibid*. (2015a), 122-123. With the emergence of a new dominant branch of the Arsacid dynasty - the Younger Arsacids - in Media Atropatene, imperial focus was diverted away from the fractious northeast and instead placed on the provinces in the Iranian plateau and Mesopotamia; Olbrycht (1997a), 98. Consequently, the contours of Parthia (the province) shifted southwards, while Nisa and other settlements north of the Kopet Dagh Mountains fell into the sphere of vassal or rival kings ruling in Hyrcania and Margiana: for example, see the S93 bronze drachms of Sanabares (c. AD 50-65) minted in Margiana, Mithradatkirt, Traxiana and Aria.

into obscurity as new factions competed for power in strongholds scattered further westwards across the Iranian Plateau and Mesopotamia.

The reliability of the Graeco-Roman sources on the invasion of Arsaces I has been rightly red-flagged by many scholars.[315] These historical accounts were compiled by foreign observers, who wrote their material principally in the western sphere and in later periods. The authors largely relied on second hand information that been diffused across the western Parthian frontier and made use of earlier annals now lost to us, filtering the information to fit their purposes and methods. A lack of insight into the affairs of the faraway east is apparent in some of the content of their works, such as Justin's claim that the name 'Parthians' comes from the Scythian word for 'exiles'.[316] While the shortfalls of the Greek and Latin accounts have been discussed in general in the introduction to this thesis, specific issues relating to the perception of the nomadic world must be highlighted.

The first issue is to do with the interpretation of historical events in order to adapt them to a narrative framework. In these written sources, the Parthian and Bactrian satrapies that succumbed to internal revolutions are paralleled in dramatically synchronised accounts: as Diodotus rebels from Seleucid rule in Bactria, Andragoras begins his revolt in Parthia. These political cataclysms invite danger from the nomadic sphere, and as Diodotus chases away Arsaces I from his province (according to alternative theories in Strabo and Arrian, p. 90 above), the nomadic invader and his marauding followers conquer Parthia and dispose of Andragoras. Later, as Mithradates the Great enjoys successes in his expanding Parthian kingdom, Eucratides the Great of Bactria suffers a reversal of fortune and is conquered by his Arsacid neighbour.[317] These vignettes of the eastern satrapies are interspersed throughout the larger narrative of the Seleucids' ebbing rule. They present the

[315] For example, Wolski (1957); Bivar (1983), 21-22, 28-30; Holt (1999), 55-60; Betts (2006), 138; Lerouge (2007); Schneider (2007); de Jong (2010), 18-19; Gaslain (2016).
[316] See pp. 88-89 above.
[317] This parallel development in Parthia and Bactria is particularly emphasised in Justin, 41.4-5, and probably draws from Apollodorus of Artimita's treatment of the episodes; see Holt (1999), 56-57.

revolutions of Parthia and Bactria as a period of severe rupture from the Seleucid sphere; however, the material remains from these breakaway satrapies intimate that a more complex process of transformation was taking place under the new rulers.

Numismatic evidence demonstrates two discrete narratives unfolding across Parthia and Bactria. The coinage of the Graeco-Bactrian kings Diodotus I and II gradually evolved away from the series of the Seleucid Antiochus II, first changing the royal portrait of Antiochus to that of the native usurper; then changing the image of the Seleucid patron deity Apollo to a thundering Zeus; and finally substituting Antiochus' name on the coinage with the legend '[of] King Diodotus'.[318] Throughout, the iconography remained wholly inspired by Hellenistic repertoire. Moreover, at the Bactrian city known today as Ai Khanoum, no signs of military trauma are evident in the city's fortifications from the time of Diodotus I's rebellion, and it is not until the later revolt of Euthydemus I in c. 225 BC that severe damage to these defences can be detected in the archaeological record.[319] Conversely, the first coinage of the Arsacids displayed a stark contrast to the established coin types of the period, displaying the new ruler wearing a diademed soft cap headdress on the obverse; an archer clothed in an Iranian riding suit on the reverse; the title *krny* 'kāren' or 'commander' in Aramaic script; and the separatist title 'Autocrat' in Greek script. Bronze units depicted items of military significance, namely the Parthian bow in a case. Only later were more identifiable elements of Hellenistic iconography incorporated into Arsacid coin design, such as the heroic demi-god Herakles or the civic goddess Tyche on tetradrachms from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.[320] Within the art and architecture of Bactrian Ai Khanoum and Parthian Nisa, elements of Greek artistry and echoes of the Achaemenid past were met with local materials, compositions and themes in the decades following the estrangement of these regions from the Hellenistic-Seleucid world. In particular, a specific comparison

[318] Holt (1999), 94 ff.
[319] Holt (1999), 62-63.
[320] E.g. S13.1-5 types of Mithradates I, and S18.1 types of Artabanus I. Phraates II also minted tetradrachms (S17.1-3) showing a Hellenistic-style goddess modeled on Tyche, and sporting an unusual beard; see Cribb (2007), 362; Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 420; Sinisi (2008), 235-237, fig. 2

has been made between groups of furniture legs discovered in the cities of Ai Khanoum and Nisa, fashioned out of ivory sourced from India or Arachosia, and sharing both Achaemenid and Greek decorative features including bell-shaped ornaments, lion paws, stacked rings, and acanthus leaves.[321] The differing impressions of rupture and continuity presented across these material sources demonstrate that a more intricate process was taking place as Seleucid imperial dominance gave way to localised, autocratic rulers. However, the dramatic narrative of the Graeco-Roman authors, embroiled in the shared fate of Parthia and Bactria's revolutions, conceals the nuances in the respective transformations of these satrapies. Though Arsaces I and his followers are presented as an alien nomadic hoard in the written sources, they were evidently not unconscious of the so-called civilised world beyond their horizon. The Arsacids assimilated into the institutions of their conquered satrapy, making use of various sedentary practices: administrating the collection of goods using inscribed records, constructing monumental buildings for the use of ceremonies, and coining money. At the same time, these sedentary practices were adapted in varying ways to suit the new rulers' identity and ideology: ostraca records show that revenue from certain vineyards maintained the royal fires of the Arsacid kings in the Mazdaean tradition, a reconstructed decorative mural at Nisa displayed a scene exhibiting mounted Iranian warriors, and the earliest Arsacid coin iconography reflected native costume elements such as the riding suit and soft cap, as well as the diadem and bow that were symbolic of royal power across the ancient Near Eastern and Scythian spheres.

A second issue that arises from the Graeco-Roman written accounts is the underlying concern with the cultural "otherness" of the Arsacid dynasty. A suspicion of the "barbaric" nomadic world was rooted deeply in western consciousness, evident from the sensationalism of the Scythians in Herodotus' *Histories* of the 5th century BC. To contrast the Seleucids' intricate political affairs that were chronicled in the Greek and Latin accounts, the so-called

[321] Bernard (1970a); Curtis, V.S. (1996), 235. Both the Parthian and Graeco-Bactrian cities also demonstrate underlying Iranian and Central Asian architectural layouts for many of their buildings, with Greek decorative details, and locally sourced materials used in their construction; Bernard (1987) [2001]; Invernizzi (2000), *ibid*. (2010), *ibid*. (2016); Masturzo (2008); Mairs (2014b).

barbarians living beyond Seleucid frontiers are reduced to lists of foreign tribal names with vague territorial spheres, as well as intriguing behaviours and customs construed for their shock value.[322] The gradual expansion of the Arsacid kingdom increasingly enveloped many Greek diaspora communities that had been established in ancient Iran since the time of Alexander. These Greek communities, which had been politically dominant in the royal courts of Alexander and his successors, were linked by a shared Greek identity based on mutual customs; in the earlier words of Herodotus, this kinship was determined by "[people] of the same blood and speaking the same language, the common temples and sacrificial rituals, and a shared way of life".[323] For the Greek communities of the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, the new kings of Parthia represented a new dynastic bloodline, speakers of a non-Greek mother tongue, worshippers of foreign gods, and practisers of strange traditions. In the eyes of western observers, the Arsacid rulers, though natives of the Iranian world at large, were viewed as irreconcilably alien to the customs and courts that had been imported into the East during the Hellenistic period. The Arsacids were aware of this perceived cultural chasm: finally, after conquering the Seleucid capital on the Tigris in 141 BC, Mithradates I struck onto his new tetradrachms the epithet *philhellenos* '[of the] Philhellene'.[324]

The treatment of Parthia in the Graeco-Roman sources can be summarised into one overarching theme: the attempt to construct a boundary between the civilised world and the nomadic world. These two poles of civilisation - *oikoumene* ('inhabited') and *aoiketos* ('uninhabited', or absence of *oikos*) – are made apparent through many binary oppositions: fertile plains and the wilderness, labouring agriculturalists and opportunistic raiders, loyal settlements and unlawful mobs, legitimate government and terrifying despots,

[322] For example, Strabo, 11.8.6 describes the customs of the Massagetae, who he reports to have butchered the bodies of their deceased and eaten the human flesh mixed with that of a cow.
[323] Herodotus *Histories*, 8.144.2.
[324] See Curtis, V.S. (2012a), 69 on the adoption of Hellenistic iconography on these issues from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, with a standing Herakles depicted on the reverse of the tetradrachms (S13.1-5), and Zeus enthroned, holding a winged Nike of the Alexandrine type on the smaller silver drachms (S13.6-10).

etc.[325] This hypothetical boundary was not just limited to rhetoric, but became realised in the large infrastructure projects across the upper satrapies during the Hellenistic period. On the eastern frontier, Alexander reportedly razed certain settlements that were troubled by revolts, and founded eight new cities across Bactria and Sogdiana.[326] New cities and colonies also sprung up across the east during the reign of Alexander and the successor Seleucid kings in Hyrcania, Parthia, Margiana, Aria, Drangiana, Arachosia and Paropamisus[327] – providing strong fortifications for the Hellenistic empire against nomadic invasions from the north and east.[328] These outposts not only served a political and strategic purpose, but also developed economic and commercial networks across the region. Newly established mints in the upper satrapies monetised these new urban centres, while the surrounding land was divided up and exploited to benefit the coffers of the Seleucid kings.[329] The Seleucid coinage that circulated amongst settled populations displayed Greek legends and administrative control marks, as well as Greek-style royal portraits and religious iconography - in essence, exhibiting a very Greek exterior to the ruling culture. This currency supported the Greek colonialists, elites, soldiers, artists, craftsmen, builders and administrators who had settled in distant, peripheral satrapies such as Parthia and Bactria. As a result, the expansion of the Hellenistic economy that strove to exploit these rich regions further fuelled the image of Hellenistic culture within urban centres, and emphasised the perceived boundary between the civilised Hellenistic world and the barbaric nomadic sphere as described in the western sources.

[325] Schneider (2007), 54 describes Rome's approach to Parthia as the "foe beyond the Roman world".
[326] Strabo, 11.11.14; Justin, 12.5.13. On Bactria and its "thousand cities", see Strabo, 15.1.3; Justin, 41.1.8.
[327] Leriche (1985) [2011] for foundations by Alexander, ancient sources and modern site names; Strootman (2015) for foundations and restorations by Seleucus I; Bing (1986) [2011] for foundations and restorations by Antiochus I.
[328] Will (1982), 268-272; Olbrycht (2014a), 113-116; Olbrycht (2015b), 272 in particular notes that Alexander was forced to make a pact with the Chorasmians in order to defeat the Sogdian usurper Spitamenes in 329 BC, realising that "anyone who wanted to secure North-Eastern Iran had to enter an agreement with the nomads and with Chorasmia, and control the Uzboy route."
[329] Strabo, 11.7.2 highlights Hyrcania's fertile plains and the neighbouring Caspian Sea, untraveled by vessels, with its islands supposedly rich in gold ore. These resources, he claims, were not fully exploited by the region's former "barbarian" rulers. See also Aperghis (2004), 91-92, 214-215.

The misgivings of Graeco-Roman observers towards the Scythian world have perhaps produced the most lasting consequences for the reception of the Arsacid dynasty in western scholarship. In their understanding of the Parni, these accounts present the tribe as rootless, roaming as a hoard with no particular identity, and without a shared history with the populations of the Iranian Plateau. The notion that Arsaces I and his followers came from an indistinct heritage and infiltrated the north-eastern corner of the Seleucid Empire, assimilating to the sedentary world in this context, has resulted in their legacy being seen through a Hellenistic lens. This perception of the early Arsacid dynasty is unsatisfactory. In the first instance, it fails to recognise the profound cultural memory of the former Achaemenid kings, whose rule during 6th-4th centuries BC had enveloped the Iranian-speaking tribes in the north-eastern territories, beyond the boundary and direct influence of the subsequent Seleucid kings. Secondly, the Graeco-Roman perspective does not grasp the long-standing impact of the nomadic world on the Iranian Plateau - an impact that did not always result from acts of war and aggression. The ancestors of the Achaemenids kings had similarly been nomadic newcomers to the Iranian Plateau in the early 1st millennium BC, following their southward migration into Persia (modern Fars Province). The Medes were also a product of a nomadic migration into northern Iran before establishing their empire in the 8th-6th centuries BC. Although the memory of these ancient migrations may have been lost in later centuries, the enduring influence of Scythian art forms in the Median and Persian periods is evident, and has more recently been addressed in scholarship.[330]

In recent decades, perspectives have begun to change. Scholarship has reconsidered that the perceived contrast of cultures (Hellenism versus barbarianism/nomadism) was ingrained more in the rhetoric of the western sources than it was in the lives of those living in the Hellenistic East. Intermarriage with ethnic noblemen and noblewomen, reverence for indigenous tutelary gods and cults, assimilation to native kingship ideals, the absorption of local mercenaries into the imperial army, and (particularly in the

[330] See discussion in Razmjou (2005b).

periphery of the empire) the indispensible economic integration of pastoral nomads and their herds with settled agriculturalists made it possible for the foreign Seleucid ruling house to consolidate its position within the diverse cultural landscape of ancient Iran.[331] Indeed, this important relationship between agricultural and pastoral societies had been cultivated under the Achaemenid kings, providing a framework for the Hellenistic kings who succeeded them.[332] The archaeological evidence, as will be discussed later, demonstrates that the predominantly Greek cities were not simply Hellenistic oases, but part of a much more complex cultural exchange between settled Greeks and Iranians, and the nomadic societies on the periphery of urban life.

2. Chinese

Although less commonly cited in the reconstruction of Arsacid history, Chinese written sources on Parthia present the same problem of bias based on the authors' own social contexts, political ambitions, and interpretation of their subject.[333] The earliest Chinese account on Parthia dates to the period when Chinese explorers and diplomats reached the empire of the Arsacids during the reign of Mithradates II. The account of the Han diplomat and explorer Zhang Qian (died 113 BC), retold by the historian Sima Qian (c. 145-86 BC), divides the territories west of China according to whether they were populated by people living in fortified cities and cultivating land, or whether they were roamed by nomadic herdsmen (sometimes also described as "barbarians"). Similarly to the Graeco-Roman sources, the tribes are located in vague terms, and their movements associated to shifting inter-tribal alliances. The Xiongnu nomads of the eastern Asian steppe, with whom the Han dynasty had remained in bitter

[331] For example, Strootman (2008), 54-56; *ibid* (2011); *ibid* (2014a) treats the process of Hellenisation in Iran not as a by-product of Seleucid kings enforcing Greek culture on their subjects, but more as the ruling class adopting a synthesised elite culture that drew from the Hellenistic kings and local nobility circles.

[332] See recently Henkelman's (2005), 159-164 discussion on exchanges between pastoralists of the Zagros Mountains, and communities in and around Persepolis during the Achaemenid period.

[333] Wang, T. (2007), 87-89. For example, Sima Qian's *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 276 comments that many Han envoys who travelled to the so-called Western Regions brought back false stories to please the Chinese emperor. The Chinese historians undoubtedly relied on accounts of these travellers to construct their geographies of the Parthian Empire. See also Posch (1998) on the first explorations of Zhang Qian to the west.

conflict, are said to have shattered the power of the Yuezhi nomads (often identified in modern scholarship as the Tochari of western sources[334]), and caused the latter to flee westwards into Daxia (Bactria). In an appropriately "barbaric" fashion, the Xiongnu leader reportedly decapitated his defeated opponent and used his skull as a drinking vessel.[335] The native Bactrians in Daxia, although now subject to the Yuehzi nomads, are described as living in cities and cultivating the land. However, this territory was no longer ruled over by a singularly powerful king, but controlled by many petty chiefs of nomadic origin.[336] Zhang Qian observed this region in the immediate years following the collapse of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom in the 130s-early 120s BC and the establishment of nomadic authority. Though it is known that the major city of Ai Khanoum was razed in c. 147 BC during the protracted invasions of neighbouring tribes, the Chinese account suggests that agriculture, irrigation and other settlements were left untouched.[337] Shendu (India) and Anxi (Parthia) are both described as nations of settled peoples.[338] These regions are perceived in the same light as the author's native Han culture: administrative bodies make records on strips of leather, currency is struck, and merchants travel and haggle in market places where exotic goods are bought and sold.[339] Chinese envoys seeking to reach these countries had to carefully negotiate and traverse the nomadic territories, risking attack and opportunistic raids – similar risks that have been associated in the western sources with the nomads on the periphery of the Seleucid sphere.[340]

[334] Mallory (2015), 11-16.
[335] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 264, 268. Similarly, the Wusun people of the Ili Valley (on the modern Chinese-Kazakhstan border) were related to the nomadic Xiongnu nation, but had grown powerful enough to establish their own authority. The Kangju in Sogdiana were also nomads and shared a similar culture with the Yuehzi; as a small and weaker tribe, they were forced to recognise the stronger Yuezhi to their south and the Xiongnu to their east. The people of Dayuan (modern Fergana, eastern Uzbekistan), in contrast, lived a more static life within their walled settlements and fortified cities, tilling the earth, and breeding horses; *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 266-267.
[336] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 269.
[337] Archaeological evidence supports this statement; see, for example, Stride (2007), 110.
[338] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 268-269; Wang, T. (2007), 90.
[339] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 280.
[340] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 275-277.

The Chinese accounts reveal some information on the northern and eastern boundaries of the Parthian Empire, while also offering some similarities to the western geographies written in Greek. According to Sima Qian's *Shiji,* the Parthians' eastern territory ended at the Oxus River; beyond the Oxus lived the Great Yuehzi and Kangju (Sogdians); and to the north of Parthia lived the Yancai and the Lixuan (respectively Saka from the Aral Sea region, according to T. Wang, and possibly inhabitants from one of the Alexandrian cities in Central Asia).[341] In the *Hanshu* by Ban Gu (AD 32-92) and the *Hou Hanshu* by Fan Ye (AD 389-445), the northern frontier is said to border the nomadic Kangju (Sogdians), who were established on the eastern side of the Oxus, while the Arsacids' eastern border was set at the Saka-occupied Wuyishanli (Arachosia or Drangiana).[342] Parts of the later *Hanshu* and *Hou Hanshu* accounts were evidently copied from the earlier *Shiji*, and the modern reader should be wary of inherited anachronisms within these works. Nevertheless, the *Hou Hanshu*, citing sources from the 3rd-4th centuries AD, specifies that the city of Merv in Margiana is referred to as "Lesser Parthia", suggesting that it had obtained a degree of independence as a vassal kingdom.[343] The works of Isidore of Charax (1st centuries BC-AD) and Ptolemy (2nd century) allude to a similar frontier shift, in which the Parthian heartland was pulled further into the Iranian plateau as a new dominant branch of the Arsacid dynasty took power in Media Atropatene, while the regions of Hyrcania and Margiana fell under a secondary Arsacid faction in the northeast.[344]

The *Hanshu* of the 1st century AD, moreover, presents two different trade routes (absent in Isidore of Charax's *Parthian Stations*) leading from China to the kingdoms to their west. The first and more popular route crossed the Pamir Mountains into the Yuehzi's Bactria and headed westwards into Parthia via

[341] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 267-268 identifies Li-hsüan (Lixuan) as Hyrcania; Wang, T. (2007), 91 compares Lixuan in the *Shiji* to the Lixuan in the later *Hanshu* referring to Alexandria in Egypt.
[342] Wang, T. (2007), 93-94, 96.
[343] Wang, T. (2007), 96.
[344] See pp. 97-98 above.

Wuyishanli (generally identified as Aria, Arachosia or Drangiana[345]); the second crossed the Pamirs and headed in a north-westerly direction towards Fergana, Sogdiana and the Saka-occupied regions around the Aral Sea before reaching Parthia (probably via the Uzboy River).[346] These descriptions demonstrate that by the 1st century AD, trade and diplomatic routes had become well developed between the imperial superpowers and the smaller kingdoms and tribes on the fringes of these empires. As is implied in the *Shiji*, there perhaps existed a certain level of linguistic and cultural fluidity from Dayuan or Fergana to the Arsacids' Anxi, demonstrating their common Iranian identity.[347] This is echoed in Justin's account, which claims that the Dahae-Parni assimilated their language and weapons to those of their new subjects in the Parthian satrapy, and by these means of acculturation they quickly assumed the role of government and kingship over the conquered settlements.[348] The networks of interchange between Parthia and those tribes clustered around the diplomatic and trading routes allows us to better picture how the Arsacid kings were able to retreat into the nomadic sphere during times of political turmoil,[349] and acquire prestigious objects from the Scythian world through diplomatic and mercantile exchange, as well as through acts of plunder.[350]

The explorer Zhang Qian had lived, perforce, amongst the nomadic Xiongnu and Yuezhi for over ten years between 138-128 BC, and married a native Xiongnu woman during this period. His original account benefits from his first hand experience of the nations and peoples to the west of his homeland; however, his reports on these distant regions (at least in its recorded form by the historian Sima Qian and successor historians) reveal the same concerns as the Graeco-Roman authors over the boundary between his civilisation and that

[345] This route from Bactria to Parthia via Wuyishanli appears to join up with Isidore of Charax's easternmost Parthian stations (§15-19). Wang, T. (2007), 93 comments that Chinese scholars generally identify Wuyishanli with Farah (Alexandria Prophthasia in Drangiana), while western scholars point to Herat (Alexandria in Areia) or Kandahar (Alexandria in Arachosia).
[346] Wang, T. (2007), 93.
[347] *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 280.
[348] Justin, 41.2.3-4.
[349] For example, when Arsaces II retreated to the Apasiacae, according to Strabo, 11.8.8; or when Sinatruces took refuge with the Sacaraucae, according to Lucian Macrobii, §15.
[350] For example, the silver mirror decorated with deer protomes and unearthed in the Square House treasury in Old Nisa; Masson & Pugačenkova (1982).

of the nomadic hinterlands. This lens through which the Central Asian territories are seen speaks more of how the Han perceived themselves at the centre of an ordered empire that was fringed by chaotic and barbaric tribes.[351] This depiction of the Xiongnu, and the pastoral world in general, must be considered with caution since Sima Qian's account also hints at trade and tribute connections between these communities and those of the sedentary world.[352]

II. Literary, Epigraphic, Archaeological and Artistic Sources from Iran

1. Achaemenid Period

The Graeco-Roman and Chinese written accounts reveal much about how these foreign observers framed the steppe culture of north-eastern Iran and Central Asia. However, it is more difficult to ascertain how native Iranian populations perceived the cultural differences between the settled communities that largely populated the Iranian Plateau, and the tribes that occupied the rugged terrain to the north and east of their periphery. This is particularly true of the Arsacid period, since no extensive, contemporary written account survives from an Iranian voice. In a similar narrative line to the accounts of foreign obvservers, the Zoroastrian *Yashts* and the Iranian epic *Shahnameh* feature tremendous battles in the which the Mazda-worshipping Aryan nation fights against the *daeva*-worshipping Xionites or Turanians on the far side of the Oxus River for the divine *khvarnah*.[353] This enduring conflict represents the

[351] Abdullaev (2007), 83-84 discusses how this mentality was reflected in the Chinese terms for different types of city, e.g. the Chinese emperor's capital *jingshi* vs. the walled forts of other regions identified with the ending *cheng*.

[352] Di Cosimo (1994), 1109-1110.

[353] Choksy (2012), 94 notes, "In the *Shāhnāme* or Classical New Persian (Farsi) Book of Kings of the 10th century AD […] Arjāsp is identified as a Turanian (thought by mediaeval Iranians to be a Turkic group) – by then the new name for the legendary villains of the Avestan people because the area east of the Oxus River or Amu Darya had come to be called Turān. In the much earlier *Avesta* or Zoroastrian scripture of the 2nd and 1st millennia BC which contains the *Yashts*, however, the *Xiiaona*- or Xyaonites appear to be another Proto-Iranian tribe or even an Iranian clan living close to and fighting with the Avestan heroes. So the term when used in the Avesta was not intended to designate any ethnic difference (as, for instance, the mediaeval Iranian versus Turk distinction)." See

greater struggle between the good forces of Truth (*asha*) and the evil forces of the Lie (*druj*).[354] The occurence of these legendary battles in these sources suggests that there existed an enduring narrative against the tribal sphere in the ancient Iranian world. In Iranian sources, however, this was framed as a struggle to champion the Mazdaean religion over those who worshipped false gods.

The earliest surviving epigraphic source for the Mazdaean religion records on stone a similar narrative and ideology. The victorious Bisotun inscription of Darius I (Kermanshah, western Iran) relates the story of the nine rebel leaders whom the Achaemenid king defeated in his first year of rule (522/521 BC).[355] These nine leaders, Darius states, caused revolts in their satrapies by falsely claiming to be kings until he, the Great King, subjugated them as an agent of Ahura Mazda.[356] The Achaemenid king describes further revolts that occurred later in his reign, and proclaims, "Afterwards with an army I went off to Scythia, after the Scythians who wear the pointed cap [Saka *tigraxauda*]. These Scythians went from me. When I arrived at the sea, beyond it then with all my army I crossed. Afterwards, I smote the Scythians exceedingly… Those Scythians were faithless and by them Ahuramazda was not worshipped. I worshipped Ahuramazda; by the favour of Ahuramazda, as was my desire, thus I did unto them."[357] On the inscribed silver and gold tablets discovered in the Apadana of Persepolis, the royal text of Darius I speaks of the nomadic populations as part of the Achaemenid Empire, now integrated under the rule of the most powerful king and under the protection of the most powerful God: "This is the kingdom which I hold, from the Scythians who are beyond Sogdiana, thence unto Ethiopia; from Sind, thence unto Sardis – which Ahuramazda the greatest of gods bestowed unto me..."[358]

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also de la Vaissière (2005) and Atwood (2012) for discussions on the highly debated relationship between the Xionites of the *Avesta*, the Xiongnu as known from Chinese sources, and the 'Huns'.

[354] Malandra (1983), 22.

[355] Briant (1996) [2002], 107-138; Huyse (2009).

[356] DB IV, §52-58; Kreyenbroek (2013), 11-12.

[357] DB V, §74-75, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 134. On Achaemenid religion in general, see Razmjou (2005a), 150 ff; and on the tolerance of the Achaemenids towards other religious cults and sacrificial practices as evidenced in the Persepolis Fortification Table, see Henkelman (2005).

[358] DPh, §2, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 137.

Despite Darius I's assault on the Saka, who he claims did not practice Achaemenid religious or cultural values, the royal palace iconography at Persepolis suggests that the Saka were not so culturally distinct from their semi-nomadic and sedentary neighbours, or from their Persian overlords. On the Apadana relief of tribute-bearers, the Saka walk in procession amongst the numerous delegations, proceeding towards the Achaemenid king as one of the subject nations. The imagined boundary between these Saka nomads and other nations is blurred: although the Saka wear a distinct pointed soft cap, it has been noted that they are dressed in a trouser suit suitable for riding, as are the Sogdians, Bactrians, Arachosians, Arians, Parthians, Sagartians and Medians, among others.[359] The weapons, jewellery and clothing carried by the Saka are also brought by other delegations, demonstrating that certain cultural and artistic traditions were shared across interconnected regions of the Achaemenid Empire. The Achaemenid king himself is displayed with items that reveal a northern influence: for example, from the Audience scene at Persepolis, the royal bow carried by the king's weapon bearer shows a stylised bird head decoration, which resembles the ornamentation on Scythian bows.[360] The archaeological record from Scythian territories, moreover, strongly suggests that gift-giving was carried out in both directions: an alabastron found within a Sarmatian burial near Orsk (Orenburg, southern Russia) was inscribed with the name of Artaxerxes I. This object is thought to have been part of a gift from the Achaemenid king to a Dahae leader in recognition of his military support during the Egyptian rebellion (456-454 BC).[361]

[359] Walser (1966), see delegations I (Medians), pl. 8; IV (Arians or Arachosians), pl. 11; VII (Arians or Arachosians), pl. 14; XI (Saka), pl. 18; XIII (Parthians), pl. 20; XV (Bactrians), pl. 22; XVI (Sagartians), pl. 23; and XVII (Sogdians), pl. 24. Newell (1938a), 476; Shahbazi (1992) [2011]; Curtis, V.S. (2000), 33-34; *ibid*. (2007a), 8-9, 18 for the continuation of the riding suit and soft cap under the Arsacid period; Vardanyan (2001), 100.

[360] Razmjou (2005b), 283; a similar golden decoration is known from the Oxus Treasure, see Tallis (2005), fig. 427;

[361] Mayrhofer (1978), no. 5.2; Schmitt (2001), 197; Balakhvantsev (2012). See also Henkelman's (2005), 159-164 argument on the Achaemenid king's power to extract loyalty from pastoralist populations (such as the Ouxioi in the Zagros region) through the act of royal gift-giving.

At Darius I's palace in Susa, the Saka nomads are listed alongside all the nations who brought building material for the decoration of the palace.[362] This inscription undoubtedly served an ideological purpose to emphasise the great size and extent of the Achaemenid king's power, but it also hints at the movement of resources and influences from the nomadic populations to the Persian heartland. The territories populated by Saka nomads were not empty, rugged lands of little value, but contained skilled archers for fighting, horses for cavalry, and other resources sought after by the Achaemenid king – particularly during times of military crisis, such as the Egyptian rebellion mentioned above.[363] Archaeological finds have demonstrated that gold, hide and fur were included amongst the valuable resources that were exported from the Scythian sphere.[364]

From the archaeological record, a handful of dress ornaments and other small items discovered within the Oxus Treasure in ancient Bactria (probably from modern Takht-i Kuwad, Tajikistan) attest to the opulence and craftsmanship that was transmitted between Achaemenid and Scythian cultures.[365] These golden and silver items were designed with the distinctive Scythian animal style iconography. Northern influences are particularly

[362] DSaa. Unfortunately, in the longer, unabridged version of this inscription (DSf), the Saka are not mentioned in connection with any of the specific building materials or craftsmanship; see Kent (1950) [1953], 142-144.

[363] The northeastern nations that served in Xerxes I's (486-465 BC) army are outlined in Herodotus' *Histories*, including the Saka, who fall under the same commander as the Bactrians (7.64); the Parthians and Chorasmians, who are also directed by one commander, and the Sogdians (7.66); the Caspian tribe, the Sarangae (Drangians) and the Pactyes (from the Kabul region) (7.67); and the nomadic Sargatian cavalry (7.85). Tallis (2005), 213, 216 notes that Achaemenid cavalrymen were depicted on cylinder seals wearing armour that had been adopted from the Saka warriors, and likewise, a richly decorated felt saddle cloth of Achaemenid style was unearthed in Pazyryk, southern Siberia, suggesting that these exchanges went both ways; see also Stillman & Tallis (1984), 68; Moorey (1985), 24; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 85-90, 95, 108-113, with figs. 5, 7, 11a-f. Balakhvantsev (2012), *ibid*. (2016) argues that contact between the Achaemenid state and the Scythians of the South Ural region flourished between the 5th and 4th centuries BC, particularly when these nomads were used by the Achaemenid king in order to suppress the revolt of Inaros in Egypt between 456-454 BC. However, following the revolt of Chorasmia from the Achaemenid state at the turn of the 4th-3rd centuries BC, ties to the southern Ural Scythians were more limited. Nevertheless, the influence of the Achaemenids in these regions seems to have endured into later centuries; see below.

[364] Olbrycht (2015b), 265-267.

[365] Curtis, J. (2012), 46-48 & figs. 27, 28, 38; *ibid*. (2005a), 39, pl. 41; *ibid*. (2005b), 148, fig. 194. The site of Takht-i Kuwad is the generally acknowledged findspot for the Oxus Treasure; however, this exact provenance is uncertain; see discussion in Curtis, J. (2004), 295-313.

apparent on the Oxus Treasure's golden *akinakes* sheath, which is decorated with hunting scenes and accentuated with Scythian artistic motifs. While some scholars attribute the *akinakes* sheath to the Achaemenid period, others have argued for an earlier Median origin, further demonstrating the deep-rooted channels between the Iranian Plateau and Scythian territories to the north.[366] Beyond the frontiers of the Achaemenid Empire, small finds across the South Ural region (such as ceramics, metallic vessels and jewellery) demonstrate that exchanges of goods and ideas also occurred between the Achaemenid provincial workshops, and those of the Saka.[367] Olbrycht has recently highlighted a kurgan that was discovered in 1911 at Prokhorovka (Orenburg region, Russia), containing two silver phialae with Aramaic inscriptions.[368] One of the inscriptions reads 'The cup of Atarmihr', while the other references the weight of the vessel.[369] The phiale of Atarmihr (a Middle Persian name) in the South Urals is thought to have been manufactured in Iran, perhaps in Media.[370]

Although the dichotomies of Truth and Lie, order and chaos, empire and rebels, Mazda-worshiping and *daeva*-worshiping appears to have been engrained into Achaemenid religion and culture, aspects of the material culture suggest that the perceived boundary between the Persian and Saka spheres was strongly constructed on the rhetoric of imperial ideology and conquest. Rather, existing cultural overlaps between nomadic tribes and sedentary peoples were

[366] On a Median origin for the sheath, see Barnett (1962); Dalton (1964), 9-11, pl. IX, no. 22; Razmjou (2005b), 282; Boardman (2006). In contrast, Moorey (1985), 26-27; Stronach (1998); Curtis, J. (2005a), 38 argue for an Achaemenid origin while still recognising the northern influences in the craftsmanship.

[367] Olbrycht (2015b), 260-261, 265-267 summarises the kind of craftsmanship and range of goods that circulated in the Saka territories, including workshop originals, as well as imitations and adaptations of styles. It has been suggested that some peripheral workshops in Chorasmia may have concentrated on exports to the steppe region, as is known to be true in Achaemenid Anatolia. The author also highlights the various routes across the steppe, through which trade passed as well as migrating nomads – these include the Ustyurt Plateau (eastern Uzbekistan/Kazakhstan), the lower Jaxartes/Syr Darya River to the Aral Sea, and the Uzboy River (a distributary of the Oxus/Amu Darya River that flowed across Turkmenistan to the Caspian Sea).

[368] Balakhvantsev (2013), 252 ff.; Olbrycht (2015b), 261-262.

[369] These objects and their epigraphic components have been dated to approximately the mid-4th to mid-3rd centuries BC by Balakhvantsev (2013), 258. Olbrycht (2015b), 261-262 summarises the various arguments for the dating of these phialae and their inscription that are presented in Russian language scholarship.

[370] Balakhvantsev & Yablonskii (2009), 140; Schmitt (2016), 62, no. 88.

largely reinforced during the Achaemenid period.[371] Exchanges that took place between these differing spheres have been described as a relationship of a "profitable co-existance", in which resources (such as herds, perishable crops, hides, prestige items, etc.) were diffused across these different regions according to demand.[372]

The objects highlighted above were carried between the steppe hinterlands, provincial regions and imperial centres. The routes by which they travelled allowed merchants and delegations to travel from the periphery to the Persian heartland. The Apadana relief of tribute bearers at Persepolis indicates that the latter brought items such as vessels made from precious metals, clothing perhaps sewn from hides and furs, bows, and horses selected from native herds. Equally, these conduits gave the Achaemenid military a faster route to rebellious satrapies and a more efficient means to survey and administrate a large empire.[373] The Persian king's military forces included mounted archers that had been sourced from the north-eastern Saka provinces, and these groups practiced their own battle techniques using their traditional weaponry and equipment. The combat attire of these Saka provinces was also

[371] This cultural overlap was strengthened by the Achaemenid consolidation of the Saka territories under Darius I; however, Razmjou (2005b), 295 also highlights Scythian influences that were preserved in the art of the Medians, which was later incorporated into the art of the Achaemenids.

[372] In his recent examination of the Persepolis Fortification Archive (dating to 509-493 BC) and the western written sources on this region, Henkelman (2005) has argued that this relationship of "profitable co-existence" thrived between the administrative body in Persepolis and the pastoral groups in the Zagros region near the city. The surplus livestock reared by pastoral tribes could be exchanged for goods that were not easily obtained through their semi-itinerant lifestyle; and the surplus, perishable agricultural produce in the storerooms of Persepolis could be exchanged for more durable commodities such as livestock; see also Briant (1982), 57-112; *ibid*. (1996) [2002], 726-733; Balakhvantsev (2010), 116; Olbrycht (2015b), 261. Henkelman further argues that the pastoralist and peasant populations were "economically dependent [on the Persepolis Fortification administration] in the sense that there was no free market and fixed prices were imposed on their trade by the central authority in Persepolis. Apparently then, the Fortification institution had sufficient strength in terms of control and economic volume to exercise a monopoly in its hinterlands". The author highlights the work of Kawase (1980) on the consignment system that operated in Persepolis and Babylon under the Achaemenid kings, in which sheep or goats were allocated to herdsmen for rearing. While the herdsmen were obliged to cover the cost of rearing the herd, they could make a profit by keeping a share of the offspring.

[373] Herodotus *Histories*, 3.94 outlines the tribute provinces of the Achaemenid Empire, placing the Sargatians, Drangians and neighbouring tribes in the fourteenth tribute province, the Saka and Caspians in the fifteenth, and the Parthians, Chorasmians, Sogdians and Arians in the sixteenth. These differ from the provincial organisation of the Achaemenid military, see note 363 above. The extensive communication and transport system across the Achaemenid Empire is examined in further detail in Tallis (2005), 210-213.

adopted by other units within the Persian army, as well as by the king himself and members of his royal court.[374] In many ways, the nomadic peoples of ancient Iran had been incorporated into the culture, administration and military power of the wider Empire, and their native costume was associated with warrior imagery even amongst the heighest ranks of Persian society. An awareness of the exchanges that linked imperial Achaemenid authorities, provincial populations and the pastoral peoples of the steppe will allow modern scholarship to recalibrate how we understand the Scythians' historical context within a wider Iranian empire, and the emergence of the Arsacid leaders from the Parni tribe of this steppe region some centuries later.

2. Hellenistic Period

The ideological boundary between the imperial and nomadic worlds became firmly cemented in western consciousness from Hellenistic period onwards, as the eastern frontier of the former Achaemenid Empire gradually contracted during the age of Alexander and his Seleucid successors. From 330 BC, the military campaigns of Alexander to secure his imperial interests in the northeast disrupted the arterial routes that extended into the steppe world, bringing about the displacement of various tribes.[375] The limits of Alexander's empire were loosely held together through agreements with the Chorasmians and related tribes; however, these regions did not collapse into the imperial domain of the new conqueror. The Seleucids inherited this eastern empire with the frontier set at Parthia, Margiana, Bactria and Sogdiana, separating the Hellenistic realm from the rugged and largely nomadic territories beyond. Later medieval and early modern literature was influenced by the idea of the Alexander Gates (also known as the Iron Gates of Derbent) on the western coast of the Caspian Sea, and the so-called Alexander Barrier (also known as the

[374] Root (1979), 279-282; Moorey (1985), 24; Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 66 ff.; *ibid*. (2000), 33; Tallis (2005), 216. In the famous Alexander Mosaic of the Battle of Issus from Pompeii, the Persian king Darius III is shown dressed for combat, wearing the distinctive cavalry costume with the soft cap. The mosaic dates to c. 100 BC; however, it is thought to have been a copy of an earlier Hellenistc painting of the 4th or 3rd century BC; Winter, F. (1909). Images of Persian kings wearing the northern cavalry suit in martial contexts are also attested on seal impressions of the Achaemenid period; Shahbazi (1975), 120-121, pl. 75; Hinz (1976), 53, figs. 16-17; Young (2003), 245; see also p. 159 below.

[375] Olbrycht (2015b), 272.

Defensive Wall of Gorgan) running between the south-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea into the Pishkamar Mountains of north-eastern Iran. These monumental constructions were once believed to have prevented the invasions of barbaric hoards during Alexander's time; however, both sites have since been re-attributed to the later Sasanian period.[376] The myth that these defences belonged to the age of Alexander demonstrates the enduring narrative of Hellenistic civilisation pitted against Scythian barbarism into later centuries.

Under the Seleucids, coinage was struck in newly established mints across Upper Satrapies from the early 3rd century BC, producing bronze coinage for local use, as well as the universal silver denominations that were exchanged from Bactria to the Mediterranean coast.[377] Coinage from beyond the Seleucid fringes is typically described by modern scholarship as "imitation coinage", produced without the finesse of the official die cutters within the Hellenistic administration.[378] However, the production of such a coinage that imitated Seleucid officialdom suggests that some level of exchange was taking place in these outlying regions with those based within the Seleucid administrated satrapies. Although Seleucid ties to this region regarding official diplomatic business were not practiced to the same extent as the Achaemenid kings, archaeological finds from beyond the Seleucid frontier demonstrate that communities from the Jaxartes and Oxus river basins to the shores of the Caspian Sea "kept up their intense, mutual links with Iran in political, cultural and economic affairs."[379] Olbrycht has highlighted especially a find unearthed in a Sarmatian kurgan in Prokhorovka: a cup of a Persian-Macedonian style made of silver and gold, originally crafted somewhere in Asia Minor, Syria or Iran, and probably dating to the late 4th-early 3rd century BC.[380] Weighing 329 grams, it has been suggested that this vessel corresponds to 100 *sigloi* in the Persian-

[376] Kiani (1982), 11-13; Nokandeh *et al.* (2006), 121-124, 161-163; Omrani *et al*. (2013).
[377] Aperghis (2004), 113.
[378] For a general overview, see Mitchiner (1973); Zeimal (1983a), 244 ff. See also Houghton & Lorber (2002, Vol. I, Part I), 483-486; Miller, R.P. (2010) on the East Arachosia (Quetta) hoard, buried in c. 206-200 BC, which contained locally made imitation coinage of Alexander, Lysimachus hybrids and of the early Seleucid kings, Seleucus I and Antiochus I. On imitation coinage of Alexander and the Bactrian Euthydemus I from Sogdiana, see Allotte de la Füye (1910), 296 ff.; Wildemann (1989); and pp. 214-215 below. On Chorasmian imitation coinage of Euthydemus I, see Vainberg (2005).
[379] Olbrycht (2015b), 259.
[380] Treister (2013), 103-105; Olbrycht (2015b), 261.

Seleucid system of weights and measures, and served as a prestige item as part of a diplomatic gift exchange.[381] If this is how the cup's value should be interpreted, then a certain level of continuity in goods, values and trade patterns can be presumed during the transition from Achaemenid to Hellenistic rule between the imperial sphere and beyond its immediate boundaries.

Excavations that began in the 1960s at the Bactrian site of Ai Khanoum, as well as archaeological surveys carried out in its environs, have unearthed new material with which to better understand the relationship between urban dwellers, the surrounding agricultural lands and nomadic pastoralists outside settlement boundaries. Ai Khanoum provides a particularly interesting example as the city was founded on the Oxus River that connected different regions and peoples along the lower river basin (including the Chorasmians and the Dahae) to the more densely populated Bactrian satrapy, said to be filled with "a thousand cities".[382] The excavated material from Ai Khanoum represents peoples and cultures that existed in the city prior to its capture in c. 147 BC as a result of a nomadic invasion (providing a valuable *terminus ante quem*), and suggests the extent to which Scythian influence was already manifested in the city before it was destroyed. These excavations and surveys have empirically demonstrated that the notion of a strict border between the civilised and nomadic populations was neither the case during the Seleucid period, nor during the subsequent Graeco-Bactrian period. Published in 2007, a contract written on a leather document shows evidence of Scythian activity in the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom. The Greek text, which is thought to date to the period c. 220-170 BC, outlines a payment of a hundred drachms between two military bodies: one a group of forty Scythians, and the other a detachment of foreign mercenaries.[383] This document determines that Scythian warriors were drawn into the Graeco-Bactrian sphere - at the very least on an ad hoc basis - in order to incorporate specific skills and expertise into the military, such as the famed mounted archers who could counter similar opponents from hostile "barbarian"

[381] See Guzzo (2003), 78-79 for the reconstruction of this weight system.
[382] Strabo, 15.1.3; Justin, 41.1.8; Masson (1987).
[383] Clarysse & Thompson (2007), 275-276.

regions.[384] Another implication of this contract is that there was a demand for coined money amongst some Scythian groups.

Archaeological field surveys in northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan have highlighted similar evidence of contact between nomads and settled peoples. The Eastern Bactria Survey (1974-1978), work on the Surkhan Darya Province, and the Sherabad Darya Project (2008-2014) have examined various aspects of nomad and settled communities, such as the seasonal movements of people, tomb sites, and dwelling spaces.[385] These surveys have found that there existed no defined boundary between the urban centres and agricultural settlements of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, and the seasonal movements of nomadic communities, particularly around important resources such as rivers and channels. From this evidence, Stride has concluded that the "natural state of [these regions] is one where pastoral activities coexist beside dry farming and irrigated agriculture, where a regional town is surrounded by villages and regularly visited by tribes that share the same land."[386] The perceived boundary between these worlds was, in di Cosimo's words, a "symbiotic, interdependent, socioeconomic system"[387] in which different specialisations (such as the pastorals' herding or agriculturalists' farming) were sought out by all in order to thrive in difficult environments. This "profitable co-existence" and intermingling of peoples is hinted at in Strabo's *Geography* where the author states that in Aria and Margiana, tent dwellers could be found roaming in the mountain regions while settlements dominated the plains.[388] Similarly in Polybius' *Histories*, the author relates the well-travelled route of the Apasiacae nomads and their horses from a distributary of the Oxus River (perhaps the Uzboy) to Hyrcania.[389] As the evidence suggests, the Seleucid and

[384] Holt (1999), 135.
[385] For the Eastern Bactria Survey, see generally Gentelle (1989); Lyonnet (1997); Gardin (1998); Mairs (2011a), 28-29; *ibid*. (2014a), 34-39. For archaeological work in the Surkhan Darya Province, see generally Huff, Pidaev & Chaydoullaev (2001); Stride (2005); *ibid*. (2007). For Czeck-Uzbek archaeological work in Sherabad Disctrict, see generally Stančo (2009); Danielisová, Stančo & Shaydullaev (2010); Abdullaev & Stančo (2011); Stančo *et a*l. (2014).
[386] Stride (2007), 115.
[387] Di Cosimo (1994), 1115.
[388] Strabo, 11.10.1.
[389] Polybius, 10.48. In Strabo, 11.8.8, the author states that Arsaces I took refuge amongst the Apasiacae, perhaps fleeing across this same route.

Graeco-Bactrian settlements in the east – at least on a local level - were more cohesive with the migration cycles of the nomadic tribes, their services and wares, and their cultural roots than the Graeco-Roman literary sources indicate.

3. Parthian Period

The ebb and flow of exchange between migrating and sedentary populations can be recognised in the archaeological evidence from the Achaemenid period, and continuing into the Hellenistic era. What does this propose for Arsaces I's relationship to the Parthians on the eve of his invasion? The Graeco-Roman accounts, which have to this date largely defined the scholarship on the early Arsacids, speak of migration from the steppe, exile and displacement from Scythia and Bactria, and raids overwhelming Parthian settlements. The violence of tribal society is pronounced in these western sources, and the arrival of the Parni in Parthia is perceived as an infringement of the barbaric world on the civilised. Nevertheless, these same sources state that within Arsaces I's lifetime, these nomadic invaders had constructed largescale forts and settlements, founded at least one city by the name of Dara, and organised armies to counter Seleucid attacks from the west and Graeco-Bactrian hostilities from the east – activies that suggest the invaders had appropriated the ways of the conquered settled populations.[390] Arsaces I, moreover, took over the mint at Nisa, and had a new silver and bronze coin types struck in his name (S1-S4). Within a few generations, Mithradates II had expanded the empire and subjected several kingdoms to his rule, established diplomatic relations with Rome and China, and celebrated his success as the 'King of Kings'. In this way, the Arsacid dynasty began to cultivate a self-identity that was based on their memory of the former Achaemenid Empire and its position of influence in the ancient Near East. Consequently, could the Parni have been as alien to the populations of Parthia as the Graeco-Roman accounts suggest, or as contrary to imperial structures and ideologies as has been intimated in Middle Persian texts?

[390] Strabo, 11.9.2; Justin, 41.5.1-6.

The site of Old Nisa – a hilltop fortress that was eventually converted into a ceremonial citadel known as Mithradatkirt (or 'Fortress of Mithradates') – allows us to think about the relationship between the Arsacid kings and their new Parthian kingdom. As in Ai Khanoum, Old Nisa was characterised by diverse and overlapping artistic traditions, including Iranian, Central Asian and Greek architectural layouts; a painted mural showing a scene with Iranian riders; marble statues of naturalistic, Greek-style deities; Achaemenid-style throne legs made from ivory; ivory rhytons depicting deities in the style of the Hellenistic pantheon; a mirror decorated with a Scythian-style deer protomes; a plate made of lapis lazuli from the Badakhshan mines near Ai Khanoum; and various other rich and opulent items.[391] These finds and architectural details demonstrate the intricate links that existed between the Arsacid citadel and neighbouring territories, particularly to the north and east, as well as historical links with their Hellenistic predecessors and earlier traditions of Achaemenid royal art.

Geographically speaking, the site of Nisa was not surrounded by expansive fertile plains. Although it received sufficient water from nearby mountain streams for viticulture, the city bordered the arid Karakum plains to the north and the rugged Kopet Dagh Mountains to the south. In the wider region, the Aral Sea in the north, as well as the ancient Oxus and Margos rivers allowed oasis settlements to flourish (Chorasmia in the Amu Darya delta, and Margiana in the Murghab delta), and provided important waterways for exchange routes. A distributary of the Oxus, the modern Uzboy River, cut through the Karakum desert, perhaps reaching the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. In this environment, it is not difficult to imagine that the urbanised inhabitants of Nisa encountered nomadic communities during their seasonal movements, especially near localised sources of water. Amongst the ostraca discovered at the fortress site of Old Nisa, a handful of fragments dating to the 1st century BC mention a *marzpān* or 'margrave' (a term which came to signify a

[391] Bernard (1970a); Masson & Pugačenkova (1982); Boardman (1994), 86; Curtis, V.S. (1996); Pilipko (2000); Invernizzi (1998); *ibid*. (2000); *ibid*. (2011a); *ibid*. (2016); Masturzo (2008); Pappalardo (2010); Tresiter (2012), 85. See Invernizzi (2010) for a more extensive bibliography on Old Nisa, its architecture and its material culture.

military governor of a frontier province in later periods), as well as an estate named *Marg Marzappadăn* 'Meadow of the Frontier Palace'.[392] The impression of these defensive spaces and officials, however, do not signify that the Arsacids created a military barrier between the urban centres of Parthia and tribal groups in the wider region. Recent research into these "border fortresses" has highlighted their purpose as "exchange intermediaries between groups of people inhabiting these transitional ecological regions."[393] Both hostile and friendly interactions with neighbouring tribes are known, scattered in references across the Graeco-Roman sources. Although Phraates II, Artabanus I and Mithradates II are known to have repelled aggressive nomadic incursions on the eastern boundaries of the empire in the 2nd century BC, other Arsacid kings sought refuge amongst tribal groups when their power in the Parthian kingdom fell under threat.[394] While the large-scale battles involving the Parthian army and alliances made by Arsacid kings are better represented in these western sources, the more ordinary seasonal movements of nomadic groups and their patterns of interaction with settled groups is less clearly documented.

Further north, on the very edge of the Parthian Empire, the fortress of Igdy Kala was built in the Uzboy Basin (northern Turkmenistan) in the 1st century BC, securing a strong Parthian presence along an important waterway that flowed from the Amu Darya delta towards the Caspian Sea.[395] This strategic site, moreover, connected the Parthian Empire to Chorasmia beyond – a region whose archaeological record shows enduring echoes of Achaemenid culture and religion. The recent discovery and interpretation of various vessels demonstrate the networks of exchange that had been developing between Parthia, Chorasmia, and regions lying further afield during the Arsacids' rise to power. In a kurgan located in Isakovka (Omsk region, western Siberia) and

[392] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), nos. 1448-1449, 1624, 1787, 2301, 2303; Kramers & Morony (1991), 633.
[393] Kidd (2011), 239. See also Betts (2006).
[394] Justin, 42.1-2 on Arsacid battles against Scythian invaders; Strabo, 11.8.8 on the flight of Arsaces I to the Apasiacae following the advance of Seleucus II Kallinikos; Lucian *Macrobii*, §15 on the restoration of Sinatruces to the Arsacid throne by the help of the Saraucae.
[395] Kidd (2011), 240-241 highlights the work of Bader & Usupov (1995), 27-28 and Cerasetti & Tosi (2004) on Parthian-Chorasmian relations in the Uzboy.

unearthed in 1989, three inscribed silver bowls were found, which the excavator dated between the 3rd-1st centuries BC.[396] One bowl contains a Parthian inscription that states the value of the vessel by its weight in Persian and Greek units: "five karshes, two staters, one drachm." The other two bowls were engraved in Chorasmian. The first inscription reads as follows, "This festive bowl is from Barzawan, son of Takhumak (or Tasumak). And now then: His Majesty, King Amuržam, son of King Warδān, (this bowl) has been made for his reward… on the third (of the month of) Frawartīn." The second inscription states, "This bowl… of weight (?) 120 staters… to the sovereign Wardak – a reward for him… Through Ruman(?) Tīr…" [397] It is thought that these prestigious vessels were exchanged between kings in Chorasmia and Parthia as diplomatic gifts sometime in the 3rd-1st centuries BC.[398] The use of the Aramaic script on these bowls, as well as the Young Avestan month names, demonstrates the lasting impact of the Achaemenid dynasty in the Chorasmian region left unconquered in the Hellenistic expansion.

Excavations at the monumental site of Akchakhan-kala in ancient Chorasmia further show that native religious practice had been influenced by Achaemenid tradition. Within the KY10 complex (dating to the 1st century BC), an Achaemenid-style furniture leg carved out of ivory was discovered near a low standing altar. The furniture leg was decorated with a dynamic mixture of artistic elements, which have been reconstructed and interpreted from

[396] Olbrycht (2015b), 262-264 with references to Matīushchenko & Tamaurovka (1997), 61 and Livshits (2003). Olbrycht, however, dates the making of these bowls to the 3rd-2nd century BC, and narrows the time of their burial to the late 2nd-1st century BC.

[397] Translations from Olbrycht (2015b), 263. The name of the Chorasmian king Wardān or Wardak was an Iranian name shared by various kings of Sogdiana and Parthia; Schmitt (2016), 227, nos. 549-550. Olbrycht goes as far as to suggest that the father of the Arsacid king Vardanes I (c. AD 40-45) may have married a Chorasmian princess as part of his policy in the region, and indeed Vardanes' brother Gotarzes II (c. AD 40-51) is believed to have formed an alliance with the neighbouring Dahae; Olbrycht (2013a), 79-80; Olbrycht (2015b), 264. Although Parthian coin finds in Chorasmia are not found in abundance, a coin of the Parthian king Vardanes I was found at Shakh-Senem in the region of ancient Chorasmia; Nikitin (1991), 123.

[398] Livshits (2003), 153-154, 169; Olbrycht (2015b), 264. Olbrycht has also drawn attention to an inscription cut into a camel's jawbone, which was found at Burly-kala in the Sultanuizdag Mountains; this inscription records a list of personal names in Young Avestan. One of these names, *Δahakīnak* 'Dahaean sword', is suggestive of Chorasmian contact with the Dahae tribe, who were linked to the Parni – the ancestors of the Arsacid dynasty. See discussion by Kidd (2011), 237-238 on Parthian-Chorasmian relations, and the region at large.

comparative material. The upper field shows five rings, while the intricate lower field contains the paw of an animal with three rounded toes, perhaps belonging to a lion in the Achaemenid fashion. However, the lower field also shows a floral pattern and a mythical winged animal that can be closely compared to the ivory termini of the Nisa rhytons. The three toes of the animal's paw are decorated with the distinct comma motif that is well known from steppe art and steppe-influences in Achaemenid art.[399] The tradition of ivory carving is well attested in Parthian Nisa, and Bactrian Ai Khanoum and Takht-i Sangin. The furniture leg from Akchakhan-kala demonstrates strong Achaemenid and Parthian influences in its design (whether it was imported or carved locally remains unknown). The context of this find – within a richly decorated monumental complex, and near an altar – is perhaps indicative that this object represents a throne leg that was connected to a royal dynastic fire.[400] Found also in KY10 complex were fragments of a painted wall depicting a crowd scene with overlapping profiles (a model that is well known in the art of ancient Iran and the ancient Near East), as well as scenes showing processions of animals, and figures wearing decorative headdresses and other items to demonstrate their elite status, such as golden earrings and torques.[401] One painted text fragment perhaps reads MLK for 'king'.[402] The monumental context and the presumed presence of a sacred fire in the KY10 complex indicates an important link between kingship and religion in Chorasmian ideology, echoing the well known elements from Achaemenid monumental art: for example, from the royal tomb scenes at Naqsh-i Rustam, the Achaemenid king is shown in the presence of a fire holder, supported by a procession of throne bearers; and from scenes at Persepolis, a procession of tribute bearers bring valuable gifts to the enthroned king, including jewellery, costumes, weapons and native animals.[403] As a permanent site, this monumental complex is also indicative of how kingship and religion was shaped into the landscape of migratory and settled communities.

[399] Kidd (2011), 250-254; Betts *et al*. (2016). See Bernard (1970a); Curtis, V.S. (1996); as well as pp. 99-100 above for similar ivory furniture legs from Bactria and Parthian Nisa.
[400] Yagodin *et al.* (2009), 8; Kidd & Betts (2010), 686 (observations of F. Grenet).
[401] Kidd (2011), 230, 243-249.
[402] Yagodin *et al.* (2009), 21-22; Kidd (2011), 232.
[403] Kidd & Betts (2010), 685-686 (observations of F. Grenet).

In Parthian Nisa, the ostraca testify to similar religious practices that embedded the king into a divine order – the royal fires of the Arsacid kings are alluded to in these fragmentary records, such as the sanctuary (*āyazan*) of Frahāt or Phraates.[404] Also mentioned in the ostraca are estates named for Artabān 'Artabanus', Mihrdāt 'Mithradates' and Friyapăt 'Phriapatius', which may have been founded in order to finance the maintenance of royal fires associated with these kings.[405] Although the locations of such fires have not been found yet in the archaeological record of Nisa, Achaemenid-style ivory throne legs that were consigned to the store house of the Square House are again suggestive of the link between the Arsacid kings of Parthia and their pre-Hellenistic heritage, demonstrating a close association between kingship and the divine world within an Iranian context.

The archaeological evidence dating to the first centuries of Parthian rule suggests that the peripheral regions were – contrary to the perception of most Graeco-Roman sources - populated by different groups of peoples with various skill sets, allowing agriculturalists to come into contact with pastoralists, and patterns of exchange to develop between these communities. Permanent structures (such as fortresses and ceremonial sites) as well as geographic markers (such as river basins) served as places of contact between nomadic, semi-nomadic and sedentary peoples. Furthermore, this fluidity between communities was mirrored by a cultural fluidity, rooted in the networks of political and religious administration, diplomacy, and trade that were established under the Achaemenid Empire. The memory of the Achaemenids, particularly in the culture of kingship, remained very much alive in the north-eastern satrapies of the Iranian Plateau and beyond this boundary, as did the former arteries of exchange that spanned these regions. How can the primary

[404] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 1640. The name of the temple has been reconstructed as *prhtk(n?)*. The date for this brief record is uncertain; however, it may be a continuation of the record found on the internal side of the ostracon (no. 2571), which dates to 95 BC. Isidore of Charax, §11 states that the royal fire of Arsaces I was located on the main road between the Hyrcanian and Parthian provinces, rather than the area of Nisa.

[405] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), pp. 185-186, 197, 200 for an extensive list of ostraca that mention the estates of 'Artabān', 'Mihrdāt' and 'Friyapăt'.

coin evidence of the Arsacids be re-examined in light of the enduring memory of the great Achaemenid kings?

- Chapter Two -

FROM PARTHIAN KINGS TO EMPERORS

Numismatic Sources for the Origins and Expansion of the Arsacid Dynasty

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With no surviving written accounts and a significantly fragmentary archaeological record, knowledge of the early Parthian state has been difficult to reconstruct with any certainty. As the most extensive primary source for this period, the Arsacids' coinage is often not considered extensively in scholarly discussion. This numismatic evidence, a fundamental expression of Arsacid power and ideology, is key to understanding the royal characters, administrative forces and cultural structures of the new dynasty, from its earliest days as a conquering Parni force to its consolidation as a new empire under the Parthian 'King of Kings', Mithradates II. This chapter focuses on the imagery, titles and epithets that were stamped onto coins, which functioned in the first instance as a practical way to guarantee these objects as legal tender, and in the second instance as a means to project messages about royal authority.

I. The Early Period - Arsaces I to Mithradates I

The first coinage of the new Parthian kingdom was struck by rulers of Iranian extraction – evident from the founder's name, Arsaces or *Arshak*, meaning 'Ruling over Heroes'.[406] However, the value of this primary source is often impaired by attempts to trace the furtherance of Hellenistic coin motifs as the Arsacid Empire expanded westwards and displaced the Seleucids. By reframing how the north-eastern Iranian communities and tribes historically interacted with Iranian provincial and imperial spheres of power, we can better understand the context in which the Arsacids established themselves in the

[406] Schmitt (2016), 44, no. 37; see p. 138 below. I am grateful to Prof. N. Sims-Williams for his comments on this etymology of the Arsacid dynastic name.

Parthian satrapy and expanded westwards across the Iranian Plateau and into Mesopotamia.

1. The Seated Archer and the Parthian Costume

Arsaces I's first drachm issues are usually recognised as a product of his tribal equestrian heritage: the ruler appears wearing a soft leather cap with a folded hood, neck guard and chin straps left untied; on the reverse, the seated archer, whose beardless face strongly resembles that of the ruler, wears the same soft cap, and is dressed in a trouser suit suitable for riding and an overcoat or *kandys* worn with the sleeves hanging empty at his side (Figures 2-3).[407] Parallels of this costume can be seen on Achaemenid period reliefs, though notably worn by various nations in the northern parts of the empire.[408] In scholarship it is usually referred to as the "Median costume", or more generally as a cavalry outfit (in contrast to the Persians' long robes and court dress).[409] On the Persepolis Apadana relief, the lead tributary in delegation IV (thought to be Arian or Arachosian) is shown wearing both the trouser suit and the *kandys* draped over his shoulders.[410] Both the trouser riding suit and *kandys* are brought as gifts to the Persian king by Median, Sargartian and Saka *tigraxauda* (with 'pointed caps', possibly the Massagetae) tributaries.[411] These delegations, moreover, wear the riding suit without the *kandys* in the procession, as well as the Sogdians, Parthians and Bactrians.[412] The trousers of the Bactrians are shown in horizontal folds, a detail also visible on the seated archer of Arsaces I's drachms. On the Persepolis Throne-bearer relief, soft caps with the hood folded to the side (like that of Arsaces I) are worn by figures who

[407] S1-5, according to Assar's revised attributions; see Assar (2004), 78-79.
[408] See p. 110 above.
[409] Schoppa (1933), 46-48; Hinz (1969), 70-72; Shahbazi (1976), 151, 153; *ibid*. (1992) [2011]; Moorey (1985), 23 ff.; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 85-90, 95, figs. 5, 7; Razjmou (2005b), 274-275.
[410] Walser (1966), delegation IV (Arians or Arachosians), pl. 11 (the riding suit without the *kandys* is more common).
[411] Walser (1966), delegations I (Medians), pl. 8; XI (Saka), pl. 18; and XVI (Sagartians), pl. 23. See also Root (1979), 279-282 on the "Significance of the Gift of Median Clothes".
[412] Walser (1966), delegations XIII (Parthians), pl. 20; XV (Bactrians), pl. 22; and XVII (Sogdians), pl. 24.

have been identified as Chroasmians, Dahae, Sogdians, Saka *haumavarga* 'haoma placing' (probably from beyond the Oxus), or more generally as Scythian.[413] The pictured Arsacid seated archer is, therefore, not simply wearing nomadic attire, but dressed in a costume that was shared by many provinces, typically those depicted on the Achaemenid reliefs as coming from the northern satrapies. Horse breeding was ubiquitous in these regions, and riding was the primary means of navigating and exploiting the landscape.[414]

The significance of the cavalry costume and its pervasiveness across these regions should not pass without remark. In Achaemenid iconography, the costume is worn by eminent Median dignitaries (hence it is often known as the 'Median costume'). This costume, moreover, is shown in several key contexts: on all of the tomb reliefs of the Achaemenid kings, the royal weapon-bearer is depicted as a figure in Median dress. Moreover, in the royal audience scene from Treasury at Persepolis, the Median-dressed weapon-bearer is shown standing amongst the principal figures behind Darius, whilst an official in Median dress approaches respectfully and converses with the king. In other contexts, the Medians are consistently emphasised as important and trusted figures: they, along with the Persians, are the only people who lead the numerous delegations towards the Persian king on the Apadana staircase relief; they are also the first delegation shown on the Apadana, and therefore the first nation to enter the king's audience hall. In addition, the Medians uniquely carry the royal throne to the king as a gift on the eastern staircase of the Apadana – perhaps, as Razmjou suggests, symbolically passing this symbol of kingship to their successors.[415]

Alongside these representations in the Achaemenid rock reliefs, the cavalry costume can be seen clearly within the material culture of the period, and is worn by a variety of peoples. This includes a) satraps and noblemen, as

[413] Walser (1966), 58-67; Vogelsang (1993) [2011]; Schmitt (2003) [2012].
[414] See Shahbazi (1987) [2011] for general notes; Polybius, 5.44, 10.70; Herodotus, 3.106, 7.40; Aristotle *History of Animals*, 9.50.30; Diodorus Siculus, 17.110; Strabo, 11.13.7-8.
[415] Walser (1966), pl. 8; Schmidt (1970), pl. 24; Tilia (1972), 190 with fig. 3, pl. 97; Moorey (1985), 25, fig. 3; Razmjou (2005b), fig. 17. Razmjou (2005b), 274-277, 283 outlines in greater detail the principal roles of the Median people in Achaemenid art.

seen in the Oxus Treasure's gold chariot model, where a satrap or nobleman rides in the passenger seat dressed in the trouser suit and *kandys*, as well as the gold and bronze models of horse riders wearing the trouser suit;[416] b) figures performing religious duties, as seen on the gold plaques and statuettes from the Oxus Treasure, where these figures wear the trouser suit, sometimes with the *kandys* and short sword, in scenes involving the sacred *barsom*;[417] and c) mounted warriors in hunting and in battle scenes, for example on seals depicting warriors in riding dress, usually on horseback, slaying animals and enemies.[418] To foreign observers, Iranians were usually visualised as wearing Median or cavalry dress.[419]

Geographically speaking, the cultures that wore this costume on Achaemenid period reliefs formed a dominant band from the north-eastern reaches of the Saka *tigraxauda* and *haumavarga*, across the Sogdians and Bactrians of the east, the northern regions of the Iranian Plateau, and up to Skudrians on the western side of the Black Sea. The influence of nomadic elements in the costume, weaponry and art of the Medians has been highlighted in detail by Razmjou, who connects this to the fact that the Medians had migrated into the Iranian Plateau from the north in the early 1st millennium BC and had evidently maintained their links to this wider cultural network.[420] For the Parni Arsaces I (who was depicted on his coinage wearing the soft cap headdress on the observe, and on the reverse as a seated archer dressed in the cavalry costume), it is important to remember this pervasive cultural network that reached across the Iranian Plateau. Justin tells us that the language of the

[416] Tallis (2005), 222-223, 226.
[417] Razmjou (2005b), 162-171.
[418] Tallis (2005), 228-231; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 97, fig. 8d.
[419] Razmjou (2005b), 275-276 highlights the statement made by Herodotus (1.135) that the Persians habitually wore Median dress. Herodotus, moreover, compares the costume of other nations to that of the Medians (7.62, 64, 66-67). See also on the significance of the Median riding suit as an Iranian combat costume, Herodotus, 7.62; Roaf (1974), 99-103; Root (1979), 281. In the material culture of the Greek world, images of the cavalry costume are also prominent - for example, the Hellenistic Alexander Sarcophagus from Sidon (4th century BC) depicts the Macedonian king battling the Achaemenid army, who wear trousers, tunics and soft caps with the hood bent over to one side as their combat attire; Hamdy Bey & Reinach (1892), pls. XXV-XXXVII. Likewise, on the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii (c. 100 BC, though based on an earlier Hellenistic work of the 4th or 3rd century BC), the figures representing warriors of the Persian army wear this cavalry costume; Winter, F. (1909).
[420] Razmjou (2015b), 296. See also Moorey (1985).

new Parthian rulers was a blend of Scythian and Median, that their clothing developed towards a light and flowing Median style, and that their weapons were partly Scythian in character.[421] His comparisons, however, were not so much a reflection of cultural differences between the "barbarian" Scythians and the Medians of the Iranian Plateau, but of the cultural fluidity between these regions.

The seated archer on Arsaces I's drachms, who probably represented the ruler himself, has also been compared to the coin iconography of the Achaemenid-period satrapal rulers of Asia Minor. V.S. Curtis has specifically highlighted the posture and clothing of the Arsacid seated bowman, which strongly resembles the image of the seated archer on silver staters of the satrap Tarkamuwa in Cilicia (formerly known as Datames) minted in the 4th century BC (Figure 34). However, while the archer figure on Tarkamuwa's coinage inspects an arrow in his hands with a bow resting at his feet, on the Parthian drachms the archer holds the bow before him in his outstretched hand. The similarities between Tarkamuwa's and Arsaces I's designs hint at the possibility that satrapal coinage may have circulated within the eastern satrapies, or was perhaps stored in mints as part of a "catalogue" of previous coin types.[422] Satrapal coinage struck in Asia Minor has indeed come to light in the Upper Satrapies. A large hoard that was probably found at the site of Takht-i Kuwad on the Oxus River (modern Tajikistan), and which is thought to have been interred in c. 180-170 BC, contained a handful of 4th century BC coins issued by Persian satraps in mints such as Ephesus, Tarsus and Sidon.[423] Among these coins types is the silver stater of Tarkamuwa showing the seated archer figure on the reverse with arrow in hand. Based on this evidence, it is reasonable to postulate that Arsaces I was aware of coin types struck by former satraps of the wider Achaemenid Empire.[424]

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[421] Justin, 41.2.3-4. See Schmitt (1998), 164-165 on the north-western Iranian language of the Parthians, and the presumed north-eastern Iranian language of the Parni.
[422] Curtis, V.S. (1993a), 233-234; *ibid*. (2007a), 9 & fig. 5; *ibid*. (2007b), 416-417.
[423] IGCH 1822, found in 1877; Bellinger (1962), 54-56; Curtis, J. (2004), 294 ff. See p. 192 above.
[424] See also Schlumberger (1954) and Troxell & Spengler (1969) on hoards IGCH 1830 (unearthed in 1933 near Kabul) and 1820 (unearthered in 1966 near Balkh), both containing coinage that was struck in Asia Minor before their internment in the early 4th century BC.

The seat of the Parthian archer can also be highlighted with regard to its nuances within the Iranian sphere. On the earliest Arsacid drachms, the archer is depicted on a backless throne or stool, with legs that have been fashioned on a lathe to make elaborate globed mouldings (Figures 2-4). This is sometimes referred to as a *diphros* in the Greek tradition, though the *diphros* is typically characterised by plain legs in Greek art.[425] Stools or thrones with these elaborate legs were prevalent in Achaemenid iconography; for example, Tarkamuwa's staters show him on this type of seat (Figure 34).[426] The same image of an archer sitting on a folding stool (this time the Greek-style *diphros* with plain legs) with a bow by his feet and testing an arrow in his hand can be found on the gold ring of Athenades, which dates to the second half of the 5th century BC, and was unearthed in the Greek city of Pantikapaion (in the modern Crimea).[427] The ring displays a Scythian subject dressed in trousers, a tunic and a soft cap; poised in the same position as Tarkamuwa's seated archer design; and engraved in the highly naturalistic artistic style of the Greek world. The overlap in the art forms of the Greek and Near Eastern spheres during the Achaemenid period is not surprising when considering the western limits of the Persian Empire.[428] After the demise of the Achaemenids in 330 BC, artistic borrowings between the Greek and Near Eastern spheres continued into both the Hellenistic and Parthian periods. Notably, on the reverse of Alexander's tetradrachms, the Greek god Zeus was depicted with sceptre in hand on a throne with elaborately decorated legs of the Achaemenid style (Figure 35).[429] The Seleucids continued to depict Zeus on their coinage in the same fashion (Figure 38), demonstrating that this eastern style of seat had become firmly established as a powerful symbol in the repertoire of Greek craftsmen in the east. Thompson has proposed that representations of the Achaemenid backless

[425] Curtis, V.S. (1996), 233-234.
[426] S1-S6. See Curtis, V.S. (1996), 233-234.
[427] State Hermitage Museum (St Petersburg), no. П.1854-26; Boardman (1972), 220, pl. 681.
[428] Kawami (1987), 31.
[429] Alexander's Zeus was perhaps modelled on the image of the divine Baal on the satrapal coinage of Mazaeus in Cilicia (later appointed as satrap of Babylonia under Alexander, according to western sources); Price (1991), 30-31; Meadows (2005), 202, figs. 357-364.

throne in Greek art came to symbolise kingship and regal splendor, and had became prominent in the west following the Persian Wars.[430]

Under the Seleucid king Antiochus I (281-261 BC), a new reverse type was introduced on coinage that was seemingly inspired by earlier prototypes, such as Tarkamuwa's silver staters: the Greek god Apollo Toxotes ('the Archer') was shown seated on his distinctive *omphalos*, testing an arrow in one hand, and with a bow resting at his feet (Figure 44). This design type was struck widely in the mints of the Upper Satrapies under Antiochus I and his successors, and is considered by some scholars as part of the dynasty's efforts to appeal to native Babylonian and Iranian subjects in the east of the Seleucid Empire.[431] While the composition of the Seleucid Apollo coin type resembled earlier iterations of near eastern seated archer figures, it has also been suggested that the Greek god was intentionally associated with native deities - perhaps the Mesopotamian Shamash or Nabû, or the Iranian Mithra.[432] Under Antiochus III (222-187 BC), the weapon pictured with Apollo was modified to the Scythian-style composite bow with a double curve (rather than the standard simple bow of Apollo) in an unknown mint located in Hyrcania or northern Media (Figure 47).[433] This variation is reminiscent of the weapon held by the Arsacids' seated archer, struck on contemporary drachms just to the east in the Parthian kingdom, and is indicative of native artistic interpretations that became imprinted on Hellenistic iconography.

As the Parthian kingdom established itself across a larger territory in the early 2nd century BC, the seated archer's stool underwent a significant iconographic change. Between 209-190/189 BC, the Seleucid king Antiochus III had succesfully taken back the Upper Satrapies, subjecting the Arsacids to his

[430] Thompson (1956), 289-291.
[431] See, for example, silver coinage from this period in Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 378-380 (from the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris), nos. 409-410 (Ecbatana), and nos. 437-439 (Ai Khanoum), with pls. 19-21.
[432] On Antiochus I's attempt to appeal to the native Babylonian and Iranian subjects in his empire; see Erikson (2009), 18, 106-130; *ibid*. (2011), 57-58; Iossif (2011); Kosmin (2014), 184-185; and Chapter Three below.
[433] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 1559-1560, with pl. 9.

rule and ceasing their minting activity.[434] When the Arsacids returned to power in early 189 BC, the seated Parthian archer was now portrayed on top of a woven basket or *omphalos* in the Greek tradition (Figure 5).[435] The cause for this change is said to have been the inevitable Hellenistic influence on the coinage of the Arsacid kings.[436] The updated image of the Arsacid archer on the *omphalos* certainly resonated with Hellenised subjects, who could recognise the replacement of the Seleucid divine ancestor Apollo with this new archer figure in Iranian dress. However, it is again possible to see overlapping artistic resonances in the Seleucid and Arsacid motifs. The *omphalos* of Apollo was a symbol of his capacity as an oracular deity. However, a similar type of woven seat is also attested in the Achaemenid period, in particular on a pendant of Graeco-Persian style from the Cimmerian Bosporus (modern Crimea). This gem was engraved with the image of an archer figure wearing a soft cap, dressed in a trouser suit and *kandys*, seated on a woven stool, with an arrow held in his hands and a bow placed at his feet.[437] The same type of stool was also depicted on other gems, all of which have been described as showing "domestic scenes" with men and women in relaxed poses. The origins of this woven stool and its role in Persian domestic scenes, however, remains unclear.

The above examples show that the image of an archer seated at ease with the bow resting at his feet was a pervasive theme under the Achaemenids and reverberated in the art of Asia Minor and the Black Sea region, across both Persian and Greek spheres. Under the Seleucid and Arsacid dynasties, this theme became ubiquitous on the coin iconography of the two powers, particularly in the Upper Satrapies. While the Seleucid motif showed the dynastic god Apollo Toxotes nude in the Greek tradition and sitting on an *omphalos*, the Arsacids' archer was depicted in native cavalry dress, sitting first on the "*diphros*" stool with legs decorated in the Achaemenid fashion, and later

[434] Sellwood & Abgarians (1971), 117-118.
[435] S7 ff.
[436] Colledge (1977), 105
[437] Boardman (1972), 317, fig. 294. Other engraved gems that depict the woven seat include the image of a seated, unarmed male figure wearing the soft cap, trouser suit and *kandys*, with a footstool beneath his feet, found near Lake Manyas of ancient Phrygia (modern central Turkey); and a seated Persian noblewomen holding a flower and offering a toy to a child, found in Cyprus; Boardman (1972), pls. 880, 891.

on the "*omphalos*" type of seat. The bow became a central part of the Parthian motif, and was depicted in the archer's hand rather than at his feet. These aspects of the iconography – costume, furniture and weapon – were either selected by Arsaces I himself, or by the engravers who worked in the mints under his authority, and who were attempting to make a design that corresponded to the new regime. While similarities can be drawn to the Seleucid archer god, the influence of older, Achaemenid traditions should be recognised in the examination of the Parthian archer motif. While the seated Parthian archer represents a continuity with past regimes and their iconography in the ancient Near East, the adapations made under various Arsacid kings show that this motif was also continually being adapted according to political circumstance and ideology. The identity behind the Parthian seated archer motif will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 below.

2. The Ruler's Portrait

Parallels can be drawn between the headdress of Arsaces I and that of the contemporary *frataraka* rulers in Persis, who had wrested some degree of power from the Seleucid hegemony in the mid-3rd century BC. On Persid tetradarchms of this period, these rulers are shown in their obverse portraits wearing a soft cap with a hood folded to the side that is out of the viewer's sight. Moreover, while some coins show the ruler's bust with the chin straps of their headdress tied up and out of the way (such as the portrait of Bagadat, Figures 52-53), others are depicted with their mouths covered by the chin straps (such as the portrait of Vadfradad I, Figure 54).[438] On the reverse of these Persid tetradrachms, the ruler is shown standing in profile in a worshipping stance, wearing the soft cap headdress, and sometimes holding a royal bow. This manner of dress had served as a unifying symbol across the broad empire of the Achaemenid king - as mentioned above, the cap was worn by various delegations in the Persepolis tribute reliefs. Moreover, they were worn by the

[438] Klose & Müseler (2008), types under 2.8. In contrast, Arsaces I and his immediate successors who are shown wearing the soft cap have the hood folded on the side towards the viewer. See also a gold coin of Vahshuvar, satrap in Parthia (late 4th-early 3rd century BC), wearing a folded soft cap in Hill (1922), 194.

Persian king in combat scenes, by satrapal rulers and noblemen, by mounted warriors in hunting and in battle, and by figures performing religious duties.[439] This particular costume undoubtedly reverberated strongly in following centuries with the revival of Iranian dynasts in Persis, Parthia, and other local kingdoms.[440]

Arsaces I's beardless coin portrait also shows a diadem band tied around his soft cap headdress – the diadem being a particularly ancient symbol of kingship in ancient Iran and Mesopotamia since the Neo-Assyrian period (9th-7th centuries BC).[441] Xenophon remarked that during the time of Cyrus the Great (c. 559-530 BC), the diadem was given to the Persian king's kinsmen as a mark of their distinction; he further adds that this tradition was continued up to the present day (for Xenophon, that is c. 430-354 BC).[442] The diadem band can be seen clearly on coins of the western satraps Tissaphernes (c. 420-395 BC) and Pharnabazus (c. 410-390 BC), wrapped around a soft cap headdress with the ties positioned at the forehead.[443] This symbol of kingship was later adopted by Alexander and his Seleucid successors in the East, though without any accompanying headdress; subsequently, it was assumed together with the soft cap by the usurper Arsaces I in the Parthian satrapy. This style of portrait was continued under Arsaces I's earliest successors (Figures 4-7), until some decades later when Mithradates I (c. 165-132 BC) made significant changes to his royal image. This Arsacid king depicted himself without the soft-cap that had been worn by his earlier ancestors, and now wore only the diadem around his brow more in the style of the Hellenistic kings (Figure 8).[444] This development in Mithradates I's iconography has been viewed alongside other changes that supposedly promoted a Hellenistic elite culture following the Parthians' westward expansion into the more Hellenised region of Media soon after 148 BC, and the later conquest of Mesopotamia – the heart of the Seleucid Empire –

[439] See pp. 126-128 above.
[440] Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 18; *ibid*. (2010), 379; Gaslain (2005); Sinisi (2014), 12.
[441] Calmeyer (1993) [2011].
[442] Xenophon *Cyropaedia,* 8.3.13.
[443] Von Gall (1974), 155-156; Hinz (1976), 141.
[444] S11 ff.

in c. 141 BC.[445] For example, on his royal portrait, Mithradates I was also portrayed wearing a type of Greek cuirass (though this was, in fact, a feature introduced to Parthian coinage by way of Pontus or Bactria).[446] Moreover, the epithet *philhellenos* '[of the] Philhellene' was used in the coin legend on tetradrachms minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and Greek-style gods were shown on the reverse of the coin denominations issued here (see Figure 9 showing Zeus enthroned with an eagle and sceptre, and Figure 10 showing a standing Herakles holding a cup, club and lion skin).[447] These elements undoubtedly reflected and dignified the prevailing Hellenistic ruling culture of the conquered Seleucid capital; however, the predominant Hellenistic culture of this city should not be overly projected onto heartland of the Parthian Empire in the Iranian highlands. The 'Philhellene' epithet was not struck onto drachms minted eastwards of Seleucia during the reign of Mithradates I, and appeared only very briefly in following years in the eastern reaches of the Parthian Empire under Artabanus I (c. 126-122 BC), for reasons discussed below.[448] The 'Philhellene' epithet only became a more or less consistent feature in the coin legends across all Arsacid mints from the mid-1st century BC until the 2nd century AD.[449]

The appearance of the diadem without the soft cap on Mithradates I's coinage can also be interpreted from an Iranian context that is independent of the Seleucid tradition (though remaining easily translatable to Hellenised subjects). Mithradates I removed the soft cap in favour of a sole diadem after he consolidated the Arsacid kingdom in Parthia, Bactria and Media by the mid 140s BC. At the same time, he adopted an eastern-style beard that distinguished him as an Iranian king. The Achaemenid period reliefs demonstrate how this type of portrait had a pre-Hellenistic precedent in these Upper Satrapies. For example, on the Throne-Bearer relief at Persepolis, the bearded Parthian and Bactrian figures are depicted with their hair encircled by a thick fillet band (on the eastern staircase of the Apadana, a looped tie can be seen on this fillet band at

[445] Colledge (1977), 105.
[446] See p. 143 below.
[447] S13.
[448] S22.
[449] S31 ff.

the back of the Parthian and Bactrian dignitaries' heads).[450] This type of headband was worn by a wide spectrum of subjects in Achaemenid art, including royal attendants, dignitaries, soldiers and monster-slaying heroes.[451] Calmeyer has emphasised that in the Achaemenid period, the diadem was never worn on its own without a crown.[452] Therefore, the fillet band worn by the Parthian and Bactrian dignitaries at Persepolis was of a native fashion, and marked a person's ethnicity or position within a hierarchy. Mithradates I's new portrait style can also be compared to that of Andragoras, the last satrap of Parthia and Hyrcania who served under the Seleucid dynasty in the mid-3rd century BC. Andragoras was possibly a member of the local Parthian aristocracy, and had perhaps claimed independence from Seleucid rule in the mid 3rd century BC.[453] He appears bearded in his coin portrait on golden staters with a thin band worn around his head (Figure 1).[454] Consequently, although the cleanly shaven Seleucid overlords wore the royal diadem, the bearded and diademed appearance of Mithradates I can also be considered as an extension of native Parthian costume and identity.

The means by which each Arsacid king ascended the throne and received his royal diadem is described in some of the Graeco-Roman accounts. Although vague in detail, the described coronation ceremonies are Iranian in character.

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[450] Walser (1966), 62-63, delegations XIII, XV. See also pls. 20, 22 for the Parthians and Bactrians on the Eastern Staircase of the Apadana.

[451] Shahbazi (1992) [2011]; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 95.

[452] Calmeyer (1976a), 51-53. The author further argues that the diadem worn on its own was a Hellenistic style introduced by Alexander, though influenced by Babylonian tradition; see also Merrillees & Sax (2005), 96, fig. 8a

[453] See note 274 above.

[454] Alternatively, the bearded figure on the obverse of Andragoras' golden staters has been interpreted as the Greek deity Zeus; see Hill (1922), 193, nos. 1-2. However, the image of Zeus wearing a band in this style is unknown on other coin types of the Hellenistic world – rather, he is depicted usually receiving or wearing a wreath; for example, on tetradrachm and drachm types of Seleucus I showing Nike crowning Zeus with a wreath from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 119-120, 122-124, pl. 7. The reverse design of Andragoras' gold stater (showing an armoured male figure riding in a *quadriga*, driven by a winged goddess, Nike) has also received significant debate. Ghirshman (1974), 6 recognises distinct Achaemenid features on the horses' harnesses, which Hill (1922), 193, nos. 1-2 had interpreted as horns. Ghirshman's observation suggests that the design may have resonated strongly with Iranian subjects despite the more overt Greek imagery in the composition. In addition, a rare silver stater of Andragoras that appeared in an auction in 1990 has been highlighted by Holt, since the male figure appears to be bearded and wearing a soft cap – Holt suggests that the figure is Andragoras himself; Holt (1999), 61, note 39 on the coin, found in *Numismatic Fine Arts* 25 (Nov. 1990), no. 202.

Isidore of Charax states that between Hyrcania and Parthia in a region known as Astauena, a member of the Arsacid family was first proclaimed king (perhaps the ruler of the S9 drachms that introduce the title *basileus* 'King', see Figure 5), and at this site an everlasting flame is kept alight.[455] In his treatise on the geography of the Parthian province, Strabo relates a story told by Poseidonius of Apamea (c. 135-51 BC) that a council of Magi and kinsmen appointed a member of the Arsacid family to the position of king.[456] Lastly, in Plutarch's description of the Parthian general Surena, the Greek biographer notes that since the beginning of Arsacid rule, members of the noble House of Suren of Sakastan were the first to place the diadem on the Parthian king's head as he assumed the throne.[457] The hero Rostam of the *Shahnameh*, identified as a scion of the Suren family, is similarly recognised in the epic as a "bestower of the crown". [458] These passages suggest that the splendour surrounding the investiture of the Arsacid king and his receiving of the royal diadem was rooted in Iranian tradition, and not performed under an overtly Hellenistic guise. The protagonists of the ceremony were the Arsacid dynasty itself, the aristocratic Suren family of eastern Iran, and the religious officiators of the Magi tradition. Therefore, the iconography and titulature on Arsacid coinage produced in Seleucia for the Hellenised Mesopotamian market was the exception rather than the norm. In the Parthian and Median heartland of the empire, Iranian traditions flourished under the new Iranian rulers, incorporating elements of the kingship tradition known from the Achaemenid period in a native Parthian guise. The Iranisation of the Arsacid kings' portraits was continued under later rulers, such as Artabanus I (c. 126-122 BC), who introduced the Parthian V-necked jacket onto his coin portraits to replace the cuirass-style costume on earlier Arsacid kings.

[455] Isidore of Charax, §11.
[456] Strabo, 11.9.3. Drijvers (1998), 288 has acknowledged the possibility of the Arsacid kingship being a sacral kingship, whereby the Magi performed a formal ritual in order to admit the new king into his royal role. However, a more nuanced argument, he believes, is that the wise men and Magi served to establish a degree of religious order to the process of becoming a king: "Wise men and priests… are in many societies the teachers and guardians of (oral) tradition: of religious traditions, of (oral) history and formal procedures."
[457] Plutarch *Crassus*, 21.7.
[458] Maguire (1974), 137; Bivar (2007), 29.

3. Dynastic Name and Titles

The titles and epithets adopted by the earliest Arsacid rulers can help to better understand how this new dynasty progressed from invaders of Parthia to kings of an empire, and to trace what model of kingship they emulated in their identity and ideology. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the name of the dynasty's eponymous founder, *Aršak* (Greek Arsaces), embodied the idea of 'Ruling over Heroes'. This name, a hypocoristic form of Old Persian *Xšaya-ṛšā* (Greek Xerxes), was shared by kings of the Achaemenid period.[459] In particular, Artaxerxes II, according to fragmentary secondary sources, was also born as 'Arshak' before adopting the throne name Artaxerxes II in 404 BC. This Artaxerxes II, according to the Byzantine chronicler Syncellus, was a claimed ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty.[460] It is uncertain at what point in Parthian history this claim was first made; however, it seems that from an early period the idea came into being that Arsaces I and his descendents were the inheritors of the Achaemenid legacy in Iran. Writing in the 1st century BC, Pompeius Trogus (preserved in Justin's 3rd century AD epitome) reflected on the Arsacid dynasty's advent to power, stating that the eastern dynasty may have considered as their greatest glory their rise amongst the "Assyrian, Median and Persian kingdoms [that were] once so celebrated."[461] The name of the dynastic founder, Arsaces I (appearing in Greek as *ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] Arsaces'), was preserved in coin legends by the founder's descendents throughout the entire Parthian period, becoming a necessary title in itself for any ruler of the Parthian Empire.[462]

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[459] Schmitt (2016), 44, no. 37.

[460] On the Arsacid claims of descent from Artaxerxes II, see Syncellus, 1.539.16f; Shahbazi (1986a) [2016]. According to Ctesias F15 §55 (Photius *Bibliotheca*, 72), the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II also held the personal name Arsaces. Variants of the name also appear as "Arsakas" in Ctesias, F15 §51 (Photius *Bibliotheca*, 72), "Arsikas" in Ctesias, F15a (Plutarch *Artaxerxes*, 1.4), and "Oarses" in Deinon (Plutarch *Artaxerxes*, 1.4) – the latter perhaps refecting the name 'Arses' with the inclusion of the Greek article (ὁ Ἄρσες); see Schmitt (1982, 92). In a late Babylonian astronomical text, there is also a reference to this name change where it is written, "*Aršu* called *Artakšatsu* the king"; see LBAT, 162.

[461] Justin, 41.1.8.

[462] Roman historians stated that only descendents of Arsaces were considered as legitimate kings, and from their perspective this rule was so sacrosanct within the Parthian Empire that the name Arsaces became synonymous with the title 'King' in the same way that Caesar and Augustus' names were given to all Roman emperors; Justin, 41.5.8; Ammianus, 23.6.5-6. Ammianus adds that it was considered sacrilege to attack any member of the Arsacid family, even during times of civil strife

The first titles used by Arsaces I on his coinage as the victorious invader of the Parthian satrapy are *ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΑΥΤΟΚΡΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of] Arsaces the Autocrat' in Greek script, and *krny ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] Arsaces the *karanos*' in a combination of Greek and Aramaic script (Figures 2-3).[463] Much debate has been focused on what these titles signify, why were they struck in dual-language, and why this celebrated ruler did not immediately adopt the title 'King' after his successful campaign into Parthia. In the Greek world, the title *strategos autokrator* 'Autocratic Commander' was conferred to generals who had been endowed with special powers of command; however, by the 4th century BC potentates who had risen to power following a military victory began to claim this title for themselves.[464] During the succession wars of the Diadochi period (322-275 BC), the title was assumed by some generals such as Peithon, who was known as the satrap of Media following the death of Alexander in 323 BC, and later as an invader of the Parthian satrapy in 318 BC.[465] Arsaces I's incursion into Parthia and subsequent establishment as an autocratic ruler echoed this period of conflict surrounding the succession of power across the eastern satrapies. The title of 'Autocrat' symbolised the disruption to the genealogical legitimacy and inherited power of the Seleucid overlords, won by Arsaces I's military victory.

The corresponding title written in Aramaic *krny* or '*karenos'* speaks more about Arsaces I's identity as an Iranian ruler. The roots of this title go back to

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(though this evidently did not deter rivals within the dynastic family from seizing the throne through rebellious acts of violence). Strabo's account, drawing on Poseidonius of Apamea (c. 135-51 BC) as a source, states that the kinsmen of the Arsacid dynasty and the Magi together appointed kings, intimating at the closeness of these two institutions concerning the sphere of kingship (see p. 137 above).

[463] S1-4. Arsaces I's titles, however, do not seem to have been cemented in the memory of later Arsacid kings. The dynastic founder's name appears alone without any title on a handful of ostraca from Nisa, usually as part of a dating formula that seems to have been introduced around the time of Phraates I or Mithradates I; Assar (2004), 71. For ostraca that make reference to Arsaces I, see Livshits & Nikitin (1994), 315 (of an unknown date); Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 2638 (91 BC), as well as nos. 2639 (78 BC) & 2640 (68 BC), which have been partially reconstructed. However, Olbrycht (2013b), 69 notes several examples where the title 'King' has been omitted from previous rulers' names on the ostraca, remarking that it was only imperative that the current ruler's title be recognised within the dating formulas.

[464] Olbrycht (2013b), 63-64.

[465] Diodotus, 18.36.6, 19.14.1.

Old Persian *kāra-na-, linked to the word kāra- 'army'.[466] In the Achaemenid tradition, the *kāra-na- was a high official who commanded military forces over a large territory, and who wielded power above the administrative satraps of the same region. In Hellenistic sources, the title was transliterated to *κάρανος* to describe a high official in charge of commanding military units.[467] The title is further attested in other sources. Firstly, in a Bactrian document (now in the Khalili Collection), referring to a certain *wšt'sp krny* or 'Vištāspa *kāra-na-*'. This figure has been associated with the Bactrian Hystaspes, who was made commander of a "barbarian" and "eastern" cavalry unit by Alexander in the 4th century BC, according to Arrian's Anabasis of Alexander.[468] A more contemporary use of the title can also be found on coins struck by Wahbarz, the *frataraka* of Persis ruling in the first half of the 2nd century BC.[469] Wahbarz completed the revolt against Seleucid power in Persis, and struck coinage using the title *krny* to declare that he was a sovereign ruler outside the Seleucid administration.[470]

While Arsaces I qualified his name with these politically provocative titles, his successor Arsaces II struck his first coinage with only the familial

[466] Olbrycht (2013b), 65-66, notes 21, 30 with bibliography on Widengren (1969), 206; Haebler (1982); Petit (1983); Dandamaev & Lukonin (1989), 222; Testen (1991); Keen (1998); Briant (1996) [2002], 19, 321, 340, 600, 616, 626, 631, 878, 925, 981, 1002, 1005; Klinkott (2005), 320-330; Runt (2011); Shayegan (2011), 170-177; Hyland (2013). See also Schmitt (2016), 115, no. 242.

[467] Olbrycht (2013b), 65-66; see also Sellwood & Abgarians (1971), 113. In Xenophon's *Hellenika*, 1.4.3, Cyrus is appointed by his father, the Achaemenid king Darius II, as *κάρανος* 'karanos' of a military force at Castolus. The historian elaborates that this Persian title can be translated as the Greek *κύριος* 'kyrios', understood as a 'lord' or a 'sovereign authority'. However, a parallel account in Xenophon's *Anabasis*, 1.1.2 names Cyrus as the *σατράπης* 'satrap' and *στρατηγός* 'strategos' or 'commander' of the Castolus forces. In addition, Olbrycht notes that the Attic office of *κύριος* 'sovereign authority' is equivalent to the self-governing term 'autocrat'.

[468] Naveh & Shaked (2012), 187-191, no. C2 (IA 20); Arrian *Anabasis*, 7.6.5. Olbrycht (2013b), 67 mentions that this may be the same Hystaspes who was an Achaemenid commander under Darius III, and is described by Curtius Rufus, 6.2.7 as the *praetor* 'commander' of a large army. Naveh & Shaked (2012), 190-191 consider whether the title *krny* 'karenos' is related to the Parthian Karin family, one of the seven aristocratic clans associated with the ruling Arsacid dynasty. However, as Olbrycht points out, the earliest attestation of *krny* signifying Karin appears much later on a Nisa ostracon dating to the year 188 of the Arsacid era (61/60 BC); see Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 1514.

[469] Klose & Müesler (2008), type 2/15; *krny* translated as Oberbefehlshaber 'supreme commander'. Klose & Müesler have dated Wahbarz's revolt to the 3rd century BC, while other scholars generally accept the 2nd century BC as the start of this period of turmoil.

[470] Klose & Müesler (2008), 27; Olbrycht (2013b), 68. See also Alram (1987a) on a rare (and possibly false) coin type of Wahbarz that shows the Persid ruler on the reverse throwing down a captive Greek.

name '[of] Arsaces' as the legend. Steadily, the new Arsacid state expanded through a series of campaigns to form a Parthian kingdom stretching from Parthia proper to Hyrcania and Media; some decades later under Mithradates I, a Parthian Empire had been established, encompassing territories from Bactria to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris and Elymais. The coin iconography and legends used by these Arsacid rulers developed accordingly. On the final coin issues that depicted the Arsacid ruler wearing a soft-cap (attributed to Phriapatius by Assar, and to Mithradates I by Sellwood), the title *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] King Arsaces' was introduced in the first quarter of the 2nd century BC.[471] The timely appearance of this royal title is significant: in c. 211 BC, Parthia lost its independence after Antiochus III's successful campaign in the Upper Satrapies. Nevertheless, after the Seleucid defeat at the Battle of Magnesia in December of 190 BC, Arsaces II seized the opportunity to return to power in Parthia and expand his territory. Rome's victory over the Seleucids was a major setback for the Hellenistic dynasty, costing them a significant depletion of territory in Asia Minor (as well as the annual tribute they had received from these territories), a financial burden of 15,000 talents in reparations, as well as the loss of their war elephants and other resources.[472] These damages unfastened the Seleucids' influence and control over the Upper Satrapies, allowing the Arsacids to advance into their rival's territories. Arsaces II took Hecatompylos (modern Shahr-e Qumis) - a major city in the west of the Parthian satrapy on the road that extended towards Media and Mesopotamia.[473] A new Arsacid capital was established here, and drachms were struck in the Arsacid king's dynastic name. Under the subsequent kings Phriapatius, Phraates I and Mithradates I, the provinces of Hyrcania and eastern Media were added to the Arsacid kingdom.[474] The disintegration of the Seleucids' power in these regions left a political vacuum that was quickly filled by the Arsacid kings. The new title 'King' in their coin legends signified this change of dynasty, and better represented the

[471] S9, attributed to Mithradates I (c. 171-138 BC) by Sellwood (1980). Assar (2005), 37-38 argues that the S9 drachms were introduced by Phriapatius (c. 185-170 BC) sometime between 184-180 BC, and that he was the first Arsacid to take the title 'King'. Assar further states that the S9 type was used as a "generic issue" by Phriapatius' successors, an unknown king (Arsaces IV), Phraates I and Mithradates I.
[472] Appian *Syrica*, 39.
[473] Polybius, 10. 28.7.
[474] Justin, 41.5.9.

developing hierarchy between the Arsacid ruler, his administration, and his subjects.

A second development in the titulature of these early rulers demonstrates how the Arsacids perceived their rising power and political expansion. The title *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] King Arsaces the Great' was introduced on coin types of Mithradates I in the middle of his reign (Figure 7).[475] Justin and Strabo recount this king's victories, stating that the he first waged a successful war against Bactria, capturing also the nearby satrapies of Turiva and Aspionus (c. 165 BC).[476] He then turned his attention towards Media and conquered the major city of Ecbatana where he appointed a satrap called Bagasis to govern (soon after 148 BC).[477] Justin states that after a spell in Hyrcania, Mithradates I pushed westwards again, taking Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (c. 141 BC), and Elymais shortly after.[478] Notably, the title 'Great' was not struck during this period on bronzes from the city of Susa, which lay in the foothills of the Zagros Mountains near the kingdom of the formidable Elymaeans.[479] Mithradates I's coinage reflects the burgeoning administration under his rule: as 'King Arsaces', his coin production was administrated using single letters of the Greek alphabet as control marks on the reverse of the drachms; later as 'King Arsaces the Great' (S10-S13), a more complex system of monograms and control marks took shape as Parthia's armies marched into new territories and built an empire. Where did the inspiration for this royal title come from, and how was it presented to those who used these coins?

Antiochus III (c. 222-187 BC) became known as 'King Antiochus the Great' once he had reinforced his rule in the Parthian and Bactrian satrapies that had revolted in the mid-3rd century BC. As Antiochus III's army marched

[475] Attributed to Phriapatius in Assar (2005), 38.
[476] Justin, 41.6.1-7; Strabo, 11.11.2. See Tarn (1930), 20-24, who identifies Strabo's satrapies of Turiva and Aspionus as Tapuria (Tabaristan/Mazandaran Province) and Traxiana (Khorasan Province) respectively.
[477] An inscription accompanying the reclining Herakles relief at Bisotun that was carved on the eve of the Parthian invasion of Media gives the date June 148 BC; Hackl et al. (2010), 476, III.1.3.F.3.
[478] Mithradates I's inaugural tetradrachms (S13.1-5) from Seleucia are dated to the period 141-139 BC.
[479] The Arsacids' power over Elymais was not fully secured until the reign of Mithradates II. Shayegan (2011), 79 ff. outlines the various raids carried out by the Elymaeans into neighbouring territories.

eastwards, he was perhaps inspired by the victory monument at Mount Bisotun (Kermanshah Province) of the Achaemenid Darius [I] the Great, who had himself subjugated revolts in the east of his empire.[480] Mithradates I would have been a young man when Antiochus III adopted this title that echoed the grandeur of the Persian victor. Nevertheless, although Antiochus' was referred to as a 'Great King' on his rock inscriptions, he did not strike this epithet onto his coinage.

The title 'Great' was certainly sought by Mithradates I's contemporaries in the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms. To the west of the Parthian kingdom, the Seleucid satrap in Media, Timarchus, made an attempt to seize power in Babylonia in c. 163-160 BC; he subsequently adopted the title and included it on his coin issues. Eastwards in the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom, Eucratides I (c. 171-145 BC) successfully revolted against his predecessor Euthydemus I, scored a victory against the Indo-Greeks and absorbed the westernmost part of their kingdom.[481] He incorporated the title 'Great' on his coin legend to celebrate these territorial gains. Beside the addition of this title, another comparison can be drawn between Mithradates I's coinage and that of Eucratides I – that is, the Greek-style cuirass worn by the rulers on their royal portraits (Figures 5-8).[482] Due to the uncertain chronology of the Graeco-Bactrian period, it is difficult to ascertain whether Mithradates I was first to adopt this title and costume, and inspired his Graeco-Bactrian counterpart to do the same; or whether, having scored a victory against the Great King Eucratides I, Mithradates I seized this title and Greek military garb for himself. Nonetheless, it is clear that a Parthian-Bactrian rivalry was underway during this period, and such influences from Parthia's eastern neighbours should be acknowledged alongside the more recognised Seleucid influences coming from the west.

[480] DB I, §6; Kent (1950) [1953], 116-120.
[481] Justin, 41.6.
[482] This costume detail is otherwise only seen in the Hellenistic world on coinage of Ptolemaic Egypt (from as early as Ptolemy II, c. 285-246 BC), the Attalid Kingdom of Pergamum (on coins of Eumenes II, c. 197-159 BC), and the Kingdom of Pontus (on coins of Mithradates III, c. 220-183 BC).

The manifestation of the title 'Great' in the late 3rd and 2nd centuries BC across the Seleucid, Parthian and Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms demonstrates a widespread trend amongst these powers to turn to the Achaemenid kings as a source of legitimacy – particularly when these states were expanding across the Iranian sphere through right of conquest, just as Darius the Great had boasted in his Bisotun relief. This trend in the Hellenistic world, most notably under Antiochus III, can be correlated to the changing nature of the royal court and nobility class, as well as the rise of autochthonous dynasties such as the Arsacids in Parthia, the Diodotids in Bactria, and the *frataraka* in Persis.[483] The Seleucid, Parthian and Graeco-Bactrian kings were following in the footsteps of the Achaemenid conquerors and emulating their notion of a 'Great' kingship, which, in turn, emulated earlier ancient Near Eastern notions of royal power, including those of the Neo-Assyrians and Babylonians. Indeed, the Roman historian Justin states that Mithradates I strove to emulate the renown of his predecessors, and his military successes thus earned him the title of his ancestors, 'Great'.[484]

On Parthian coinage, the appearance of the title 'Great King' is connected to the Arsacid expansion into Bactria, Hyrcania and Media, and prompted a change from the diademed soft-cap headdress on the ruler's coin portraits to the bearded, diademed and bareheaded style. These developments in the coin iconography and inscriptions were carried out before Mithradates I marched victoriously into Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in 141 BC, and struck coinage here declaring his Philhellenism. Measured against the preceding developments in titulature and costume, this epithet *Philhellenos* '[of the] Philhellene' appears more as a reassuring statement from an Iranian king rather than a literal one of assimilating his mode of kingship to Greek ideals. Arguably, the principal city of the Iranian highlands, Ecbatana, played a more significant role in the development of the Arsacid Empire. From Greek written sources, we are told that it became the principal treasury of the empire, as well as one of the major

[483] Strootman (2011a); *ibid*. (2011b), 18; *ibid*. (2014a); *ibid*. (2014b).
[484] Justin, 42.2.3.

royal residences of the Arsacids.[485] Moreover, coin evidence shows that this city housed the principal mint of the Arsacids in the highlands, and provided the ruling dynasty with a strategic position along lucrative crossroads stretching westwards and eastwards.[486] Ecbatana, of course, had been a principal city centre during the Achaemenid and Median empires of the past, acting as a summer residence in the case of the former, and the main capital city in the case of the latter. Notably, Artaxerxes II, the claimed ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty in the account of Syncellus, is known today for his building activities at Ecbatana in the 4th century BC, which included inscribing his name and title *xšâyathiya vazraka* (Old Persian, 'Great King') on column bases, as well as invoking the names of the divine Anahita and Mithra – *yazatas* who will be further discussed below.[487] Despite Mithradates I's impressive victory at the Seleucid capital of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Arsacid powers remained largely concentrated in the Iranian highlands. This is reflected in the minting output of silver across the 2nd and early 1st centuries BC, particularly under Mithradates II.[488] Accordingly, our interpretation of the coin iconography, legends and their inherent ideology should not be measured against purely Hellenistic standards and models. From the early period of Arsacid rule, these kings developed a narrative that mirrored their political rise to the grandeur of the Achaemenid Empire. Arsaces I had ridden into Parthia with his followers, overthrown the satrap Andragoras, and established himself as a ruler who was not appointed by the Seleucid regime. Accordingly, he named himself as an Autocrat and *karenos* in Greek and Aramaic script on his drachm issues. His throne name, Arsaces, established a connection to the ancient Achaemenid kings of the past, and described the victorious invader as one who is "Ruling over Heroes". The Arsacids soon became kings in their own right through their conquests into neighbouring territories, and then 'Great Kings' in the Achaemenid fashion following the formation of an empire under Mithradates I.

[485] Isidore of Charax, §6; Strabo, 11.13.1; Polybius, 10.27.
[486] Curtis, V.S., *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[487] A²Ha, A²Hb; Kent (1950) [1953], 155. Soudavar (2003), 87-88; *ibid*. (2010a), 118-119 argues that Apam Napat and Mithra were revered as the dual deities of the Medians in the 7th-6th centuries BC, though Anahita was to later replace Apam Napat as the principal Water divinity. A long tradition concerning the worship of this divine duo may account for Artaxerxes II's invocation to Anahita and Mithra in Ecbatana.
[488] See pp. 48 ff. above.

II. The Empire after Mithradates I and the Reign of Mithradates II

From the beginning of the Arsacid period in the mid-3rd century BC to the establishment of the Parthian Empire under Mithradates I, the Arsacid kings had founded new fortresses and settlements, captured Hellenised cities, allied with noble families and retained their dependent populations, and conquered local kingdoms that had begun to flourish during the instability of the Seleucids' dissolution. For his role in expanding the Arsacid-held territories, eradicating rebellions, and establishing the Parthian Empire as the dominant power in the east following the Seleucid decline, Mithradates I is arguably the greatest of the Parthian kings. Nevertheless, following the death of Mithradates I, the Parthian Empire experienced a decade of turbulence, in which two successive kings died fighting against nomadic incursions on the eastern frontier. After the investiture of Mithradates II, the diverse regions and populations of the empire were firmly consolidated, and stretched from the western borders of Bactria to the River Euphrates. His legacy as one of the greatest kings of the Parthian Empire is second only to that of Mithradates I. During turbulent times, coinage became an especially important resource with which the king could propagate his legitimacy, power, wealth and achievements to a geographically, culturally and socially diverse audience. In particular, Mithradates I's struggling successors used coin legends to emphasise their legitimacy through three main themes: their political power, dynastic associations, and divinely sanctioned glory.

1. Imperial Troubles

Mithradates I was first amongst the Arsacid kings to issue the tetradrachm in the Parthian Empire, striking a Parthian version of this denomination at the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris from 141 BC (Figure 10). The legend on these tetradrachms reads *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ* '[of the] Great King Arsaces, Philhellene'.[489] Striking this

[489] S13.1-5. See note 302 above on the meaning of 'Philhellene'.

particular legend in the captured capital of the Seleucid Empire sent a clear message to the Greek-speaking inhabitants of the city that the Arsacids were not hostile to their cultural identity (nor their religion, as the image of the Greek god Herakles was struck onto these tetradrachms, and Zeus on the accompanying drachms from this city).[490] By presenting himself as an ally of the Greek population, Mithradates I distinguished himself as a tolerant ruler, enlightened to the culture of those residing in this highly Hellenised city of Mesopotamia. The Greek historian Diodorus Siculus of the 1st century BC (known for his interest in the morality of the individual and community) alludes to the inclusive nature of this Parthian king, claiming that he integrated the best of each conquered region's customs into his empire.[491] Mithradates I's coin iconography illustrates this point: for example, the solitary diadem band that replaced the soft cap on obverse coin portraits presented a more recognisable image of royalty to these Greek populations; and the 'Philhellene' epithet demonstrated a particular desire to be seen as a ruler who is sympathetic towards the ethnic Greek populations that fell within the Parthian imperial sphere.

After Mithradates I's death in 132 BC, his son Phraates II took the throne.[492] Phraates II struck tetradrachms and drachms at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris bearing the legend *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΝΙΚΗΦΟΡΟΥ* '[of the] Great King Arsaces, Bearer of Victory' (Figure 11).[493] The victory celebrated to by Phraates II on these issues was that against Antiochus VII in 129 BC, which allowed the Parthians to regain their footing in Media and Babylonia, and

[490] Carved in 148 BC at Bisotun on the road leading from Ecbatana in Media to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Mesopotamia, a relief dedicated to the god Herakles Kallinikos was set up for the preservation of Kleomenes, the commander of the Upper Satrapies who was resisting the Parthian advance. The choice to depict the apotropaic god on Mithradates I's tetradrachms in 141 BC was perhaps deliberate in light of the relief at Bisotun, demonstrating the Arsacid king's protection over the city following his victory there. See Ḥākemī (1959-60); Luschey (1968), 30, pl. 16.2; *ibid*. (1974), 122 ff., pls. 15-16; Bernard (1980), 316-318; Boyce & Grenet (1991), 93-94; Hackl et al. (2010), 476, III.1.3.F.3.

[491] Diodorus Siculus, 33.18.

[492] The date for Mithradates I's death is according to Assar (2005), 43.

[493] S17. See Cribb (2007), 362; Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 420; Sinisi (2008), 235-237, fig. 2 on the curious bearded "Tyche" depicted on the reverse of these issues.

become the dominating power in Mesopotamia once again.[494] The epithet served to demonstrate this king's right of conquest, and hence his power in the former Seleucid capital. Notably, the epithet 'Philhellene' of his father was absent from Phraates II's tetradrachm issues in Seleucia, perhaps highlighting a growing period of difficult relations between the reigning Arsacid king and his Greek subjects.

Although Phraates II managed to secure his power in the west of the empire, Graeco-Roman sources expose the political instabilities that underlined Arsacid rule after the death of Mithradates I. Justin's historical account claims that the vassal kings in the east had come to Antiochus VII to offer their support as they detested the arrogance of the Parthians.[495] This resentment seemingly followed Phraates II to the east during a campaign against a band of nomadic invaders on Parthia's frontiers. It is said that Phraates II was killed during this campaign due to his contempt towards a contingent of captive Greek soldiers. Justin recounts these events in his epitome: "Phraates [II], however, led to war with him an army of Greeks who had been captured in the war against Antiochus [VII], and whom he had treated with arrogance and cruelty, heedless towards the fact that captivity had not lessened their hostile spirit and that the indignity of their injustices had further exacerbated them. Therefore, as soon as they saw the battle turn against the Parthians, the [Greek] soldiers changed to the enemy's side and carried out revenge for their captivity, which they had

[494] Justin, 38.10.10-11.

[495] Justin, 38.10.5. Though Mithradates I had extended his power over diverse cultural regions, the Seleucid anabasis undertaken by Antiochus VII ostensibly created a clash of cultures. Justin's epitome remarks on the wealth which Antiochus VII brought with his army: "There was certainly such an amount of silver and gold that even the common soldiers fastened their boots with gold and trod on the material for the love of which nations battled by the sword"; Justin, 38.10.3. A gold stater, which Assar has argued was minted by the Seleucid king in Ecbatana after a victory against Mithradates I in 134/133 BC, displays on its reverse Nike driving a *biga* leftwards - the same design as Mithradates I's lower-value bronze emissions from the same mint that show the goddess driving to the right (S12.9, 14); Assar (2005), 49; Houghton, Lorber & Hoover (2008), no. 2134-AV, pl. 36. Antiochus VII had inscribed on this gold issue *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΟΥ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ* '[of the] Great King Antiochus, Benefactor'. These gold coins from Ecbatana exhibit a striking display of power and wealth. The precious metal itself is perhaps indicative of the Seleucid king's self-proclaimed euergetism on coins struck in the city of Ecbatana.

desired for so long, through the bloody slaughter of the Parthian army and of Phraates [II] himself. In his place, his uncle, Artabanus [I], was made king."[496]

Phraates II had attempted to counter some of the turmoil that troubled his reign by fusing the Arsacid and Seleucid royal lines through a complicated process of intermarriage. Phraates II is said to have married a princess who was of Arsacid and Seleucid extraction, being both a granddaughter of Mithradates I and a daughter of Demetrius II (the elder brother of Phraates II's Seleucid opponent, Antiochus VII). Demetrius II had been captured during an earlier war with the Parthians in c. 139 BC during the reign of Mithradates I, Phraates II's father. During his captivity in Hyrcania, Demetrius II was married off to a daughter of Mithradates I. According to the historian Justin, Demetrius II attempted to abandoned his wife and escape to Syria, but was brought back into captivity under Phraates II; the Seleucid prisoner was only trusted again after he had fathered children in Hyrcania.[497] Justin believed that the Arsacid king wanted to instigate a dynastic feud in the Seleucid house by placing Demetrius II as their ally on the Seleucid throne in Syria.[498] This political manoeuvre aimed to secure the Parthian Empire under Phraates II while his Seleucid half-brother would have ruled in Syria, giving the Arsacids an extended political reach. The strategy, however, proved ineffective: Demetrius II abandoned his Arsacid wife and children in Hyrcania after escaping Parthia, returning to Syria and marrying Cleopatra Thea.[499]

Other efforts to emphasise Phraates II's legitimacy to rule over the Parthian Empire and its contested frontiers were made more apparent in his coin legends. Across a number of mints that were specifically opened to supply coinage for the eastern campaign against the invading nomads, Phraates II issued a high volume odrachms with a new epithet *ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of a] divine father' (Figure 13).[500] This title highlighted the Arsacid dynastic succession

[496] Justin, 42.1.4-5, 42.2.1.
[497] Justin, 38.9.2-9.
[498] Justin, 38.9.10.
[499] Nabel (2017), 26 ff.
[500] S15.2, S16.1-16, 18-24. The epithets ΦΙΛΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ '[of the] father-loving' (S15.3) and ΥΠΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ '[of his] father' (S16.17) are also attested, though the latter is significantly rarer.

between Mithradates I and Phraates II, and also suggest that Mithradates I had been deified after his death according to the Seleucid institution of a ruler cult.[501] Fragments from a group of clay statues found in the Round Hall complex of Nisa are thought to reprsent Mithradates I as a deified ancestor; Invernizzi notes that while the facial features of the bust resemble that of Mithradates I, the long beard suggests that the statue was modelled on an older depiction of the king, and was perhaps commissioned by the late king's son, Phraates II.[502] The concept of an Arsacid ruler cult will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Following Phraates II's demise in the eastern campaigns, a brother of Mithradates I took the throne in c. 126 BC. Artabanus I's reign was plagued by insurgency in the regions of Elymais and Characene, Arab incursions into Babylonia, as well as the continued conflict with the Tochari nomadic invaders in the north-east of the Empire.[503] Artabanus I made use of similar dynastic affirmations in the coin legends on his drachms, describing himself as *ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of a] divine father' (in reference to Phriapatius), as well as *ΦΙΛΑΔΕΛΦΟΥ* '[of the] Brother-Loving' (in reference to Mithradates I).[504] The efforts of both Phraates II and Artabanus I to emphasise their dynastic link to the Mithradates I is evidence of his enduring imprint on Arsacid ideology concerning the formation of the Parthian Empire and its 'Great King'.

Furthermore under Artabanus I, the epithet 'Philhellene' made a re-appearance on coinage, peculiarly in Margiana.[505] This curious use of the epithet in the eastern city of Margiana is emphasised by the fact that it was not struck on coins from the Greek city of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris during Artabanus I's reign. So why was this ethnic-specific epithet that had been introduced by Mithradates I in the former Seleucid capital now being used in the east of the empire? The evidence from Justin's account suggests that Artabanus I was still

[501] The problematic concept of a ruler cult under the Mazda-worshipping Parthian kings is addressed in greater detail in Chapter Three.
[502] Invernizzi (2001), 141-147; *ibid*. (2011a), 196-200, fig. 8; *ibid*. (2011b), 655-657.
[503] Sachs, Hunger (1996), 278-279, -124 B rev. 12 ff.
[504] S19-20, S22.1, S22.3-4.
[505] S22.1-2, S22.4.

reliant on captive Greek forces to defend Parthia's borders against the north-eastern nomads – the same Greeks whom Phraates II had incited to revolt against his authority. This theory, however, is rather unsatisfactory on some accounts, since it is unlikely that the Parthian king did not command sufficient indigenous soldiers in the Upper Satrapies to defend his eastern frontier. The Greek presence in Artabanus I's army may also be accounted for by the descendents of the numerous military colonists who had been settled in Bactria under Alexander and Seleucus I, and who were perhaps displaced during the nomadic invasions into the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom from the east, as narrated in Greek and Chinese sources.[506] The epithets on Artabanus I's coins demonstrate this king's efforts to appeal to the political stability that was established with the Hellenistic populations under Mithradates I, who was also honoured in the coin legends as a beloved brother (Figure 15). Unfortunately, like his nephew, Artabanus I was killed in the defensive battle against the nomads on the eastern frontier.[507]

During Artabanus I's reign, innovations in the royal portrait demonstrate a movement towards a distinctive Parthian image of royalty. The king's hair was displayed on his coinage in a more eastern fashion, formed in uniform rings of tight curls (Figures 14-15). At the same time, the king was shown wearing a Parthian V-necked jacket with crossed lapels embellished with circular appliqués, as well as a torque curling around his neck.[508] This costume was depicted on Artabanus I's coinage widely, in the westernmost capital of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris on tetradrachms, in the easternmost mint of Margiana on drachms, and on bronzes across various mints including Susa.[509] Nevertheless, while the Arsacid king wore this V-necked jacket on its own in his coin portraits,

[506] Strabo, 11.8.2, 11.8.4; *Shiji*, 123, translated in Watson (1968), 265, 269.
[507] Justin, 42.2.2.
[508] S18.2, S19-S22; Curtis, V.S. (2000), 25; *ibid*. (2007a), 15. The full royal trouser suit of the Parthian kings can be seen in the investiture scenes on tetradrachms of Phraates III (c. 70-57 BC) from S39.1, and of his successors; see Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 62; *ibid.* (2000), 25; *ibid.* (2007), 15; *ibid*. (2012a), 71; Sinisi (2014), 15-17. Furthermore, the royal Parthian costume can be seen particularly clearly on the 1st century BC life-size bronze statue of the Shami Prince, discovered in the Bakhtiari region of southwestern Iran and now housed in the National Museum of Iran, Tehran; see Curtis, V.S. (1993b); ibid. (2000), 26-27, fig. 8.
[509] Seleucia: S21.1-4; Margiana: S20.5-6, S22.4; Susa: S21.5-9.

the additional long overcoat or *kandys* remained a fixed part of the iconic seated archer's costume until the end of the Parthian period. This development is perhaps explained in Justin's account: "Their clothing once reflected their own customs, but after their wealth had increased, it became light weight and flowing like that of the Medians."[510] Following the Arsacids' imperial expansion, royal residences were established in the milder climates of Media and Mesopotamia at the cities of Ecbatana, Rhagae-Arsacia, and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Ecbatana, in particular, served as the principal summer residence of the Arsacid kings, while Seleucia was used as the main winter residence.[511] Parthian period costume is again described in a passage by Plutarch on the Parthian general Surena and his army at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC: while the general wore Median-style clothing, the warriors under his command were dressed in Scythian fashion and glistening in Margianian steel armour.[512] Although fashions developed as new centres of power were established across the expanding empire, many of these costume elements were already pervasive across the Iranian nations with slight distinctions in detail. These early innovations in the royal portrait were furthered under Artabanus I's successor, Mithradates II, who strove to develop and consolidate a new, "Parthian-ised" imperial model.

2. Imperial Consolidation

During a remarkable reign that spanned three decades, the Parthian Empire became fully consolidated at its greatest territorial extent under Mithradates II (c. 121-91 BC). Its borders stretched from the River Euphrates in the west to the satrapies of Bactria, Drangiana, Sakastan and Arachosia in the east. In the south and west of the empire, the Arsacid king nominally held sway over the kingdoms of Persis, Elymais and Characene; and in the north-west, he asserted his power in Media Atropatene and neighbouring Armenia. Diplomatic ties were formalised with Rome across the Euphrates, and with China beyond

[510] Justin, 41.2.4.
[511] Strabo, 11.13.1.
[512] Plutarch *Crassus*, 24.1-2, perhaps referring to cataphract armour. The general Surena, a member of the Suren family, perhaps drew these warriors from his homeland of Sakastan in eastern Iran (modern Sistan).

the Oxus. By 109 BC, after a little more than a decade on the throne, Mithradates II was known as the 'Great King of Kings' – the first since the demise of the final Achaemenid 'King of Kings', Artaxerxes V, at the hands of Alexander in 329 BC. It was during this period that ideas about the ruling dynasty's heritage, kingship and legitimacy took on a uniquely Parthian form in the coin iconography and legends.

Mithradates II's inaugural tetradrachms from Seleucia (S24.1-8) sent out a clear message concerning his political ideology and policy. The portrait on the obverse displayed the king facing to the left in the Arsacid fashion (whilst preceding Arsacid kings had followed the right-facing example of the Seleucid kings at this mint, compare Figures 10-12, 14 and 17).[513] This subtle change matched Mithradates II's portrait on his Seleucian tetradrachms to that on his drachms that were minted in great numbers in the heartland of his empire across the Iranian Plateau (Figure 18). Moreover, whilst earlier Arsacid kings had preserved Seleucia's Hellenistic coin iconography (principally depicting an enthroned Tyche holding a winged Nike on the reverse designs), Mithradates II boldly removed these Greek deities from his tetradrachms and replaced them with the iconic Parthian seated archer.[514] Although Mithradates I had propagated his policy of philhellenism in this city some decades earlier, Mithradates II now sought to mark Seleucia-on-the-Tigris as an Arsacid domain.

[513] The change of direction from right to left had been carried out by Arsaces I as a simple means to distinguish his coins types from Seleucid types; see S1-S2, Figures 2-3. Under Mithradates I, the S12 coin series from Ecbatana shows the king facing right in the Seleucid fashion; this series, particularly its reverse iconography, was heavily influenced by Seleucid types that had been minted in Ecbatana in previous years under Demetrius I and Alexander I. For example, compare the Dioscuri-themed reverse designs on bronze units of the Parthian Mithradates I and the Seleucid Demetrius I; S12.19; Houghton, Lorber & Hoover (2008), no. 1746, pl 74. Mithradates I's S13 silver coin issues from Seleucia also show his portrait facing to the right in the established Seleucid fashion (Figures 9-10). Phraates II's S15-S16 coinage from Media and further east shows him turned to the left in Arsacid fashion (Figure 13), while on his S14 and S17 silver issues from Seleucia and Susa he is shown facing the right in Seleucid fashion (Figures 11-12). The same distinction is seen on Artabanus I's coinage from the Iranian highlands, with the royal bust facing to the left (Figure 15); and from Seleucia and Susa, where the royal bust faces to the right (Figures 14, 16).

[514] Sellwood 1980, S15.1 records a tetradrachm type of Phraates II that depicted the Parthian seated archer on the reverse; this has been attributed by Sellwood to the mint of Ecbatana, where drachms showing the Parthian seated archer on the reverse are also attested (S15.2-3). Phraates II's more extensive series of tetradrachms from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (S17.1-3) depict a more Hellenistic reverse type of a seated goddess holding a cornucopia against one shoulder, and Nike in her other outstretched hand. Peculiarly, the goddess here appears with a beard; see Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 420; Sinisi (2008), 235-237.

Accordingly, the epithet 'Philhellene' was absent from Mithradates II's tetradrachm legends at this mint.[515] This is not to say that Mithradates II instigated an anti-Hellenistic policy – in fact, Greek inscriptions from nearby Babylon establish that Greek culture prospered in the Hellenised city during this period, and most likely did in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris as well.[516] The shift in coin iconography and legend under Mithradates II, rather, underlines the firm consolidation of Parthian rule in southern Mesopotamia following several decades of political instability since its capture by Mithradates I in 141 BC.[517]

The developments carried out by Mithradates II at the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris were part of an overarching re-organisation of minting practices across the Parthian Empire. Mithradates II's portrait became increasingly homogenous across the mints on their issued denominations: all showed the king facing to the left and dressed in the Parthian costume. A torque and earring are both visible on the portrait. The treatment of the hair and beard became increasingly less naturalistic, and hence less Hellenistic in style; instead a "deliberate effort towards formalism" is visible in the execution of the king's locks and facial hair.[518] Though these artistic developments had been instigated under Artabanus I, they were adopted uniformly by Mithradates II, even in the more strongly Hellenised cities of Seleucia and Susa which previously had favoured the naturalism of Greek art. Mithradates II was first depicted wearing the diadem tied around his brow, but later in his reign the Parthian tiara was

[515] The epithet 'Philhellene' is attested on a rare silver type of Mithradates II (S23.3), minted at Margiana at the beginning of his reign; Loginov & Nikitin (1996); Nikitin (1998); Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018). This coin type was a continuation of Artabanus I's output from Margiana (S22.4) that shares the same epithet in the legend, and that was associated with settling the nomadic threat in the east; see pp. 150-151 above. Mithradates II also included 'Philhellene' amongst his epithets on a rare bronze type (S27.8) that shows the king with a radiate crown on the obverse, and which was perhaps minted at Margiana or Nisa; Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).

[516] A clay tablet with a Greek inscription, now kept in the Louvre, Paris, was found near the *palaestra* in Babylon, and lists the victors of the games that took place in the 137th year of the Arsacid Era (111-110 BC), when 'Arsaces the Great, Epiphanes, Philhellene' was King. This dating formula was used alongside the former Seleucid Era (the year 202 on this document). Moreover, a gymnasiarch is mentioned, demonstrating the enduring role of Greek officials in the city. See Haussoullier (1903), 159, no. 4; Schmidt (1941), 816 ff., no. 5. Spek (2005) discuses in greater detail the traditions of Greek citizens in Babylon that endured into the Parthian period.

[517] See pp. 48 ff. above.

[518] McDowell (1935), 160.

adopted as a new symbol of his power (Figures 22-23).[519] In these later years of the king's rule, his nose became more pronounced and eastern in character. Under Mithradates II, the reverse iconography on all silver denominations depicted the seated Parthian archer. This icon of the ruling dynasty, portrayed in the very non-Greek riding costume and carrying the composite bow of a mounted archer, was infused for the first time into the tetradrachm iconography of Seleucia. The die engravers in this city's workshops, once heavily rooted in Greek artistic tradition, now took its iconographic cues from the mints further east. Finally, the bronze coinage of Mithradates II from the mints in the Iranian Plateau was also reorganised across four denominations - tetrachalkoi, dichalkoi, chalkoi and hemichalkoi – with each depicting a standardised, set motif (Figures 81-86). The iconography on these bronzes maintained a strong Parthian flavour, including the images of a horse and the Parthian composite bow with a double curve in a case. In the special case of Susa, where the bronze reverse iconography was extremely varied, very few images of Hellenistic gods were struck onto the coinage by the later years of Mithradates II's rule. Rather, motifs that resonated with eastern iconography, such as lion and bull heads, eagles, flowers, and crescent moons, appear on the reverse of these bronze units (Figures 97-102). This homogenisation of a Parthian imperial model was made possible due to the military and diplomatic successes of Mithradates II and the subsequent consolidation of the Parthian Empire. The details of this imperial model, particularly of the royal portrait on Mithradates II's coinage, will be examined in closer details below.[520]

In the years before Mithradates II assumed the throne, his uncle Artabanus I appeared on coinage for the first time wearing a V-necked jacket with crossed lapels and a geometric grid decoration at the top of the sleeve, further embellished with round appliqués. Iconography from previous centuries, most notably the monumental reliefs of the Achaemenids, depict the various horse breeding nations of the empire wearing a trouser suit with a tunic that

[519] See pp. 158-166 below. Mithradates II was depicted in this tiara on drachms minted in the Iranian Plateau and on bronzes from Susa; by this point in time, his minting activity had seemingly ceased in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris.

[520] On the diffusion of Arsacid art in general, see Sinisi (2014).

crossed over at the front and tied at the waist with a belt.[521] However, little ornamentation on this riding costume to individualise these nations has survived – these details would have been rendered in paint and have since worn away.[522] One exception is the relief on the western façade of the west staircase in the Palace of Darius I at Persepolis (probably added to the Apadana some centuries later by Artaxerxes III, 359-338 BC). Here, both the delegation climbing the stairs on the right and the delegation in the lower left of the central panel wear the soft cap and trouser suit with the tops of the sleeves decorated at the shoulder. Costume details are also worn by certain figures depicted on the golden votive plaques from the Oxus Treasure, including beaded patterns as well as bird ornaments sewn into the outer trouser leg of one particular figure carrying ritual instruments.[523] The only known material example of a decorated trouser suit of this kind was discovered in the Issyk kurgan (south-eastern Kazakhstan) dated to the 4th-3rd centuries BC, and unearthed in territories once occupied by the Massagetae or Amyrgioi nomads.[524] This costume, often interpreted as that of a royal or priestly figure, was found with thousands of sewn golden appliqués and animal decorations (including arrow-heads, crescent moons, horses, birds and bird wings and stags), a highly ornate pointed soft cap in the style of the Saka *tigraxauda* (with 'Pointed Caps'), boots, various weapons, jewellery, as well as other items. The riding suit was worn from the north-eastern steppe to the Iranian Plateau, and was depicted in the royal reliefs of the Persian kings as a visual marker of these countries. By adopting this costume into the coin portrait iconography, the Parthian kings highlighted their heritage and kinship with the populations of Media, Parthia, and further north. The costume, moreover, differed from the imagery of the royal court of the Achaemenid kings, who wore Persian robes in their commissioned rock reliefs, seals and on their coinage.[525] New decoration details that were added to

[521] See p. 110 above.
[522] Schoppa (1933), 48.
[523] Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 79; Razmjou (2005a), 162-167, figs. 213, 227; see also figs. 216, 236, where the costume contains a stripe of circular decorations similar to Artabanus I's costume on his coinage.
[524] Akishev (1978), 43-52. On the complex dating of the Issyk Kurgan, see Panyushkina *et al.* (2013), 1298.
[525] While Persian robes were worn in court scenes, the trouser suit was adorned by the Achaemenid kings in combat scenes; Root (1979), 279-282; Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 66 ff.; *ibid*. (2000), 33.

the riding costume under Mithradates II and subsequent kings served to showcase the royal glory of these rulers.

Mithradates II introduced a new star embellishment on his costume on some of his coin portraits, imparting a radiant aura to his image (Figure 19). The application of this detail on only some of the king's portraits functioned as a type of control symbol and reflects the inner organisation of the mint; however, the practical function of this star decoration does not mean that it was void of symbolism and not a true likeness of the king's regalia.[526] This decoration was perhaps realised in embroidery, precious beads, pearls or golden plates that were sewn onto the royal costume – a technique that is better known from the surviving material culture of the Scythian world.[527] Mithradates II's costume innovation inspired star embellishments on the coinage of later Arsacid kings, as well as other magnificent designs, including the images of a mythical creature, bird-of-prey in flight and thunderbolt on coins of Orodes II, and a winged goddess holding a palm branch and diadem on coins of Phraates IV (Figures 26-27, 30-31).[528]

The different terminals that decorated the end of Mithradates II's torque include a simple or double pellet, a fabulous winged creature, and a fork shape (probably a schematic rendering of the winged creature).[529] This mythical creature has been interpreted by Wroth and Shore as a winged horse, and by Sellwood as a sea-horse.[530] On the coin portraits of later kings in the 1st century BC, two distinct zoomorphic torque endings were used: the first showing a mammal, possibly a horse; and the second showing a winged creature, possibly a winged horse or griffin (Figures 25-27, 29-31). These decorate terminals

[526] Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[527] Rudenko (1970), 83-110; Akishev (1978), 47-52; Moorey (1985), 24; Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 65; *ibid*. (2007a), 18; Jacobson (1999), 63-64.
[528] S46-S48, S54 tetradrachms types. Images of a bird-of-prey on the costume of Orodes II may be associated with the Varegna bird that carries the *khvarnah* in its wings between kings and the divine Mithra; Yt. 19.34-35. Zeus' thundering lightning bolt can be compared to Mithra's all-powerful arsenal that he uses to bludgeon his enemies while raging from the sky; some examples include Yt. 10.18, 69, 132-133. The winged goddess on the costume of Phraates IV (recognised as the victorious Nike in the Greek world) can be identified with Ashi as the bringer of victory to far-shooting archer warriors in the Iranian tradition; Yt. 17.12.
[529] Curtis, V.S. *et al* (forthcoming 2018).
[530] Wroth (1903), 25, no. 7 ff. and Shore (1993), 100, no. 70; Sellwood (1980), S24.10, for example.

perhaps served as heraldic symbols for the Arsacid dynasty, especially considering the role of the horse in Parthian culture, iconography and religion (see Chapter Four). This kind of jewellery is well attested under the Achaemenids, with endings such as duck and lion heads, as well as griffins and dragon protomes known from the material culture of this period.[531] Indeed Xenophon, in his work *Anabasis*, commented that necklaces and bracelets were worn by the most noble of Persians.[532] The concept of a torque ring ending in an animal terminal was exported across the Persian Empire as a prestige item: on the Apadana staircase of Persepolis, torques were brought as gifts to the Achaemenid king by various north-eastern delegations, including the Saka *tigraxauda*, Sogdians and Medes, as well as the Lydians from the west of the Empire.[533] In the Scythian world, similar pieces of richly decorated jewellery have been found in elite burial contexts, some with more localised artistic flourishes (such as panther or tiger terminals, for example), and these served to indicate the high status of their wearers.[534] Jacobson has noted that torques with multiple spiralling rings are, moreover, likely to be another nomadic variation of the concept.[535] Thus, by elaborating their coin portraits with winding torques that were ornamented with magnificent animalistic terminals, the Arsacid kings bought into this canonised image of elite status and prestige in a way that highlighted their northern roots.[536]

The final important development that occurred in the portrait iconography of Mithradates II was the introduction of the tall, domed Parthian tiara or *kolah* that was decorated with arch-shaped beaded embellishments and a central star/sun motif (Figure 23). On one exceptional series from the principal mint of Ecbatana, the king's headdress was decorated with a distinct

[531] Curtis, J. (2005), 132-133; Razmjou (2005a), 174-175, fig. 270.
[532] Xenophon *Anabasis*, 1.8.29.
[533] Walser (1966), delegations I (Medians), pl. 8; VI (Lydians), pl. 13; XI (Saka), pl. 18; XVII (Sogdians), pl. 24.
[534] For example, from the Issyk kurgan, Akishev (1978), pls. 28-29. See also Jacobson (1995), 105; Kidd (2011), 246-247, with notes 93, 97.
[535] Jacobson (1995), 105.
[536] Jacobson (*ibid*.) contrasts the spiraling Scythian torques to the single ring torques of the Achaemenid kings in the Near Eastern tradition, which has a greater focus on symmetry (as reflected in their monumental art).

arch of beaded crescent moons (Figure 22).[537] A neckflap and cheek guards were also shown as part of this tiara, reminiscent of the soft-cap headdress and its functional appendages. On Mithraadtes II's tiara, however, these elements were also decorated with a decorative beaded border. This tiara was, moreover, encircled with a royal diadem.[538] This splendid headdress was a unique symbol of Mithradates II's royalty amongst his contemporaries in the ancient Near East. Nevertheless, the inspiration behind the Parthian tiara's design can be examined against the impressive headdresses in the art of earlier periods.

On monumental rock reliefs, the Achaemenid kings were depicted in court dress wearing a tall cylindrical crown – the tallness being key to distinguish the royal figure from lesser Persian dignitaries at his court.[539] On the Northern Doorway of the Main Hall at Persepolis, Schmidt has remarked that cuts in the stone to the sides of the tall crown may indicate that the king's headdress was decorated with gold details and jewels.[540] The same rule of height applied to the soft cap that was worn with the cavalry costume: while the Persian king wore his cap upright, in contrast the satraps, warriors and dignitaries wore this headdress with the hood folded down (except in the case of the Saka *tigraxauda*, whose tall, pointed soft cap bowed slightly backwards). This is documented most extensively in the writings of Greek authors.[541] However, the same upright soft cap can also be seen on the figure of Darius III in the Alexander Mosaic from Pompeii (believed to be a copy of a Hellenistic painting from the 4th or 3rd century BC), and on the "Cyrus I" cylinder seal impression, as well as that of the prince Artimas of Limyra.[542] Finally, the

[537] S28.1. Tiara types S28.5-6 showing a wavy line may represent stylised crescent moons.
[538] S28 drachm types; Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[539] The main exceptions are Darius' victory relief at Bisotun, where the king appears with the stepped battlement-style crown, and the scenes of the royal hero battling a series of animals and beasts at Persepolis. On the tall crown, see Schmidt (1953), 116, 163, 226, pls. 121-123, 140-141; Roaf (1983), 131-133, fig. 132, pl. 35; von Gall (1974); Shahbazi (1992) [2011].
[540] Schmidt (1953), 116, pl. 76.
[541] Xenophon *Anabasis*, 2.5.23; Arrian *Anabasis*, 3.25.3; Plutarch *Artaxerxes*, 26, 28; *ibid*. *Themistocles*, 29.
[542] Winter, F. (1909); Shahbazi (1975), 120-121, pl. 75; Hinz (1976), 53, figs. 16-17. See also Young (2003), 245 on the "Cyrus I" seal impression with refrence to its dating, which he believes is closer to the time of Darius I on stylistic grounds. In Greek sources, the royal headdresses of Persian kings are referred to variously as the *kidaris*, *tiara orthe* ('tall tiara'), and *kyrbasia*. Distinctions between the

diadem encircling the king's tall crown was a sure sign of his royalty. This combination of the tall headdress and diadem was cemented under the Achaemenid kings as a regal marker.[543] The high reaching tiara of Mithradates II, worn with the royal diadem band tied around the base, was evidently inspired by the criteria for royal headgear from the time of the Persian kings.

Another type of headdress that was depicted in the art of the Achaemenid period can be highlighted for its distinctive domed shape – the same shape that characterised Mithradates II's Parthian tiara some centuries later. A rounded cap was worn by Median dignitaries on the monumental rock reliefs, as well as a bust of a Mede from the a 5th or 4th century BC, unearthed near Tehran.[544] The Median domed cap can also be traced further afield, appearing notably on some of the finds from the Oxus Treasure. In particular, a golden figure of a rider modelled into a seated position (once mounted on a horse), is shown wearing the riding suit with decorated seams at the shoulder and along the hem; on his head he wears a tall domed soft cap with a neck guard hanging down the back and cheek guards cinched around his chin.[545]

Further north, the significance of the headdress is also evident within the archaeological material of the Eurasian Steppe. Excavations of Scythian burial

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cylindrical tiara associated with court dress and the upright soft cap associated with cavalry dress are not clearly defined by these foreign observers; see Olbrycht (1997b), 38-39; Ritter (1965), 8.

[543] Calmeyer (1976a), 51. Xenophon *Cyropaedia*, 8.3.13 remarks that the diadem band was worn by the kinsmen of the Achaemenid king as a sign of their distinction, and this can be seen on coins of the western satraps Tissaphernes (c. 420-395 BC) and Pharnabazus (c. 410-390 BC), where the diadem is shown tied at the forehead; see von Gall (1974), 155-156; Hinz (1976), 141. The diadem worn with a tall headdress, nevertheless, remained exclusive to the Achaemenid king.

[544] Ghirshman (1964), pl. 295; Calmeyer (1977), 174-182; Shahbazi (1992) [2011]; Olbrycht (1997b), 40. Another surviving representation of this headdress can be seen on a silver rhyton that was discovered at the Erebuni Fortress in Yerevan, Armenia, and which dates to c. 500 BC. The figure's domed cap is embellished with an arched decoration around its outer edge, while the central motif depicts an eagle with its legs and wings spread out; Arakelyan (1971) cited in Harper (1978), 29-30 with fig. 1a. This elaborate design is strikingly reminiscent of the later Armenian tiara with two eagles flanking a central star/sun motif; this tiara was introduced on coinage by Tigranes II the Great (c. 95-55 BC) following his reinstatement on the Armenia throne by Mithradates II; Lang (1983), fig. 39b; see p. 169 below.

[545] British Museum, 124098. The domed cap with neck and cheek guards can also been seen on the Persepolis reliefs, worn by Median attendants (and in contrast to the Median nobles, whose domed cap is not shown with a neck guard or check guards tied across the mouth); Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 82-85, figs. 40, 43, 47-48. See also Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 163, fig. 250 for a similar figure wearing a domed cap with neck and cheek guards, depicted on a golden votive plaque from the Oxus Treasure.

mounds have brought to light specimens that were ornamented with golden appliqués and plaques, with some stylistic influences from the Achaemenid world (demonstrating the networks that stretched from the Iranian Plateau into these northern and eastern reaches). As mentioned above, from the Issyk kurgan (modern south-eastern Kazakhstan), a highly ornamented headdress was unearthed, tall and pointed in shape, and decorated with a plethora of golden details including stylised animals, mountain shapes, arrows, and bird wings.[546] Furthermore, a golden diadem was discovered amongst the Issyk treasures, decorated with a jagged edge to represent either a mountain range or a vegetal pattern.[547] Holes along the diadem indicate that it was attached firmly to the headdress. Other golden ornaments from the Issyk burial mound include golden appliqués that were hammered into arrowheads, crescent moons and other geometric shapes, as well as torques with animal heads, earrings, rings, and plaques showing stylised animals and mythical creatures. Scythian influences on the royal tiara of one of the Parthian "Dark Age" kings, Sinatruces, indicates that the northern steppe regions had some influence on the decorative headdresses of the Arsacid kings. This Sinatruces is thought to have seized power in part of the Parthian Empire towards the end of Mithradates II's reign, or soon after his death in c. 91 BC; he was later expelled by Gotarzes I in c. 88/87 BC. The expelled Arsacid king took refuge amongst the Scythian Sacaraucae, and successfully returned to the Parthian throne a decade later in c. 77/76 BC.[548] After his re-entry into the Parthian Empire, he was depicted on coinage wearing a tiara with a horn emerging from the side, and stag protomes attached to the domed top.[549] This ornamental "animal style" is believed to have been inspired by the art of his Scythian hosts.

[546] Akishev (1978), 24-29, 47 with figs. 62-63, pls. 2-12. On similar material from the frozen tombs of the Pazyryk Valley in the Altai Mountains, Siberia, see Rudenko (1970), 90-91.
[547] Akishev (1978), 26, pl. 1.
[548] Lucian Macrobii, §15; Assar (2005), 52-52; *ibid*. (2006a), 55-69; *ibid*. (2009b), 210-214. For the reconstruction of the Parthian "Dark Age" royal chronology, see McDowell (1935); le Rider (1965); Simonetta (1966); *ibid*. (2001); *ibid*. (2009); Waggoner (1974); Dobbins (1975); Sellwood (1976); Simonetta & Sellwood (1978); Mørkholm (1980); Weiskopf (1981); Loginov and Nikitin (1996); and Vardanyan (2006) with further bibliography.
[549] According to Assar (2005), S33.

Mithradates II's elaborate diademed tiara, strongly reminiscent of earlier royal traditions, served to highlight the king's royal stature. Its majestic height signified the royal position of its wearer, echoing the tall headdresses worn by the Achaemenid kings at their royal court and in warfare. The rounded shaped of Mithradates II's tiara is also evocative of the Median domed cap that was depicted widely on Median nobles and attendants in the reliefs of the Achaemenid kings.[550] Similarities between Mithradates II's tiara and the domed headdresses of the Median nation are not surprising, given the importance of this region during the Parthian period. The Parthian tiara was introduced solely on his drachms that were struck abundantly across this imperial economic centre, in the principal Median mints of Ecbatana and Rhagae-Arsacia.[551] As noted earlier, the mint of Ecbatana also produced a special verison of Mithradates II's tiara that was decorated with beaded crescent moons around the central star motif. The growing affinity between the new Parthian kings and their Median neighbours, particularly in manners of dress and costume, was noted in Justin's account, where he claims that the Arsacids were quick to adopt clothing of Median fashion as they expanded across the Iranian Plateau.[552]

The added embellishments on Mithradates II's tiara provided the Arsacid king with an opportunity to express ideas about his heritage, kingship and legitimacy. Mithradates II first depicted a central star or solar motif (with six or eight points) surrounded by crescent moons (specifically from the Ecbatana mint) or arches of beads along the outer edge, perhaps made of resplendent pearls, precious stones or gold appliqués.[553] These symbols held deep-rooted religious overtones in the ancient Near East, appearing in the art of the Assyrians as early as the 2nd millennium BC alongside the deities Shamash, Ishtar and Sin. From the time of Mithradates III of Pontus (c. 220-200 BC), the star/sun and crescent moon symbols appeared on this dynasty's coinage as a heraldic motif associated with the divine world and, in the words of Saprykin,

[550] Olbrycht (1997b), 40; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 97 suggest that the Median cap was the principal inspiration for the Parthian tiara.
[551] Tiara types of Mithradates II were also struck on bronze coinage from the mints of the Iranian highlands, as well as in the mint of Susa; S28.8-23.
[552] See p. 152.
[553] Sellwood (1980), S28, tiara types i-vii; Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

"linked to the cults of Mên, Mithras, and Ahura-Mazda, [reflecting] their victory over darkness, i.e. evil, the main religious aspect of Persian Zoroastrianism."[554] Mithradates II's tiara decoration can be viewed in light of the king's relationship to the divine world, in particular to the important *yazatas* Mithra and Anahita, and to the divine *khvarnah*.[555] Furthermore, the *yazata* of the bright star Sirius, who is called Tishtrya, can be highlighted in connection with the astrological decoration of Mithradates II's tiara.

In *Yasht* 10 addressed to Mithra, the *yazata* is accompanied by the radiant *khvarnah*, which soars alongside his chariot like blazing Fire (Yt. 10.127). Mithra is also described as radiant, luminous like the Moon and with a face that blazes like the star Tishtrya (Yt. 10. 142-143). His close alliance with sacred Fire (*atar*), as well as his movement across the sky surveying all that is under the swift-horsed Sun (whom he follows in his golden chariot) eventually developed into a more direct association between the *yazata* and the Sun itself.[556] Fire played a strong role in the ideology of the Arsacid kings, who are said to have established an everlasting fire on the outskirts of the Parthian satrapy.[557] At Nisa, one particular ostracon refers to a temple of Phraates, which may have housed a royal fire for this king; moreover, numerous ostraca mention the estates of Artabanus, Mithradates and Phriapatius, which were perhaps established in order to finance the maintenance of similar royal fires.[558] Perhaps related to the cult of these royal fires are several rare coin types associated with the mint of Nisa, and with the mint of Margiana to the east; Phraates II, Artabanus I and Mithradates II all produced bronzes showing their portraits adorned with a radiate crown – a feature generally associated with the sun-god Helios in the Hellenistic world.[559] The significance of Mithra as a companion to sacred Fire and the divine *khvarnah* make this *yazata* a likely

[554] Saprykin (2009), 263. See also B.C. McGing (1986), 97.
[555] Olbrycht (1997b), 45; Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 421-423; *ibid*. (2016), 182-183.
[556] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 28-29.
[557] Isidore of Charax, §11.
[558] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 1640 for the 'temple of Frahāt', and pp. 185-186, 197, 200 for a complete list of ostraca that mention the estates of 'Artabān', 'Mihrdāt' and 'Friyapăt'.
[559] S16.28 type of Phraates II, with a tripod depicted on the reverse; S20 variant type of Artabanus, also showing a tripod on the reverse; and S27.8 for the type of Mithradates II, with Nike depicted on the reverse. See also Curtis, *et al*. (forthcoming 2018) with G.R.F. Assar (pers. comm.).

protagonist in the religious ideology of the Arsacid dynasty. The throne name of Mithradates II, meaning 'Given by Mithra', exemplifies this relationship between the king and the *yazata*. The divine being's name was, moreover, immensely popular within the aristocratic class serving under Mithradates II – in the *Astronomical Diaries* that cover the reign of Mithradates II and the years following his death, three consecutive generals are named: 'Mitradata', 'Mitratu' and 'Raznumitra'.[560] Like Mithra, the divine being Anahita is described in luminous, cosmological detail, wearing in one anthropomorphised form a golden diadem studded with a hundred stars (*Yt*. 5.128). She soars from the heavenly stars to the earth where she is worshipped by kings and heroes seeking the *khvarnah* (*Yt*. 5.85-86). Isidore of Charax notes that she was worshipped at Ecbatana, and sacrifices were frequently performed at her temple.[561] The special recognistion of the divine beings Mithra and Anahita in royal ideology was not unprecedented: Strabo recognised that her worship was practiced strongly in Armenia and in Pontus, where kings swore oaths within her temple; Plutarch similarly mentions her temple at Ecbatana in his biography of the Achaemenid Artaxerxes II.[562] Alongside the supreme deity Ahura Mazda, Mithra and Anahita were invoked for the first time in the royal inscriptions of the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes II at Ecbatana and Susa.[563]

[560] Shayegan (2011), 198-204 with references to Sachs & Hunger (1996).
[561] Isidore of Charax, §6;
[562] Strabo, 11.8.4, 11.14.16, 12.3.37; Plutarch *Artaxerxes*, 27.3.
[563] A^2Ha, A^2Hb, A^2Sa, A^2Sd in Kent (1950) [1953], 154-155. In *Yasht* 13, which is dedicated to the band of guardian spirits and divine warriors known as the Fravashis, it is the *yazatas* Mithra and Apam Napat 'Son of the Waters' who are invoked to "promote all supreme authorities of the countries and […] pacify those in revolt", meaning they provide protection for the righteous king and destroy any rebellion that may rise up against him; *Yt*. 13.95, translated in Malandra (1983), 115. Although the goddess Anahita later overshadowed the Zoroastrian Apam Napat as the *yazata* of the Waters (evident from the inscriptions of Artaxerxes II at Ecbatana and Susa), Soudavar (2010a), 123-125 has argued for the lingering influence of the latter in the iconography of the Achaemenid kings. On the palace façade at Persepolis, Soudavar interprets a panel of glazed bricks as a representation of the Kingly Glory and its "life cycle": a pearl symbolising the *khvarnah* is protected by the Waters (from the *Zam Yasht*, 19.51: "This Xwarənah reached the Wouru.kasha sea. Immediately, Napāt, whose horses are swift, took possession of it [… saying]: I shall keep this Xwarənah at the bottom of the deep sea"); on the brick panel the pearl rises from the Waters radiantly, shining alongside sunflowers that represent Mithra (from the *Mihr Yasht*, 10.61-61, radiant Mithra "who allows the plants to grow […] who gives neither fortune (xwarənah) nor reward to any man false to a covenant"); translations of the *Yashts* in Malandra (1983), 66, 93.

While the central motif of the tiara can be interpreted as a solar symbol, it may also have represented a star – specifically the brightest star in the sky, Tishtrya. Soudavar has examined in finer detail the characteristics of the *yazata* in verse Yt. 8.4. He highlights in particular the descriptive terms *chihr/chithra* 'radiance' or 'brilliance', *raevant*- 'glittery', and *berezant*- 'blazing' or 'radiant'.[564] The original meanings of these three terms, Soudavar argues, are often bypassed in favour of secondary, derivative meanings. Hence, *afsh-chithrem* is sometimes translated as 'containing the seed of water' instead of Soudavar's preferred 'scintillating like water drops'; *raêvañtem* is translated as 'rich'/'wealthy'/'opulent' instead of its more literal meaning 'glittery'; *berezañtem* is translated as 'lofty' instead of 'blazing'/'radiant'; and *berezât haosravanghem* is interpreted variously as 'good fame' and 'renown' in favour of 'kingly radiance'.[565] In summary, these various terms are applied in the *Yasht* to describe Tishtrya's astral brilliance, and symbolise the radiant kingly *khvarnah* that is under the protection of the *yazata*.[566]

In the first stanza of the *Tishtrya Yasht*, the hymn states, "I shall worship with librations the star Tishtrya the allotter of (one's) land, so that the glorious, opulent [*xᵛarənaŋhuṇtō*, lit. '*khvarnah*-endowed'] stars and foremost the Moon will assist me; [they allot xwarənah to men]", demonstrating Tishtrya's association with the other radiant stars and the Moon.[567] In the following stanza, Tishtrya is given another descriptive epithet: the adjective *raevant*-, which Soudavar has stated means 'glittering', and was specifically applied to the "light intensity of jewelry and precious stones", from where its secondary meaning of 'rich'/'wealthy'/'opulent' derived.[568] This association between Tishtrya's astral brilliance that glitters like precious stones was perhaps a source of inspiration for the decoration on Mithradates II's tiara. Soudavar has examined the motif of

[564] Soudavar (2015), 27-31.
[565] Compare, for example, Malandra (1983), 143; Skjærvø (2007), I:85; Soudavar (2015), 28-30, 67.
[566] Soudavar (2015), 30.
[567] Yt. 8.1, translated in Malandra (1983), 143. The meaning of this verse is known to be problematic; see Panaino (1990), 27, 87-88 with no. 2. Panaino offers the translation, "…The Moon (or: board?), lodging and sacrificial food we worship. (At time) when the *xᵛarənah*-endowed stars follow each other before my eyes bestowing *xᵛarənah* to men, I will worship the bestower of homestead, the star Tishtrya, with libations."
[568] Soudavar (2015), 28-29. See also *ibid*. (2006), 156-157.

a star inside a crescent moon as a symbol of Tishtrya in the art of the later Sasanians; nevertheless, this motif has a strong precedent in the art of the Arsacid kings and of rulers in neighbouring kingdoms (Figures 29, 32, 55, 58).[569] The role of Tishtrya as a dynastic ancestor in the ideology of the Arsacids will be examined again in the following chapter.

In the Avestan *Yashts*, obtaining the *khvarnah* that is created by the supreme Ahura Mazda is a principal occupation of Iranian kings and their non-Iranian enemies. The bestowing of the *khvarnah* brings Ahura-given victory, superiority in conquering, resistance against evil and enemies, strength, good health and longevity, nobility, eloquence, good progeny, knowledge, and radiant dominion (*Yt.* 19.73-76). Its brilliance was a true marker of legitimacy in Iranian ideology. The royal diadem (another symbol of divinely appointed kingship) that was looped around Mithradates II's tiara compliments the brilliant cosmological motifs of the headdress. A comparison can be drawn to the headdress of the winged figure on Darius I's Bisotun monument. Here, an eight-pointed solar disc was inserted within the tall, cylindrical headdress of the enigmatic winged figure sometime after the original carving of the relief. Soudavar has interpreted this as a borrowed symbol of the Babylonian solar deity Shamash to represent the *khvarnah* that is created by Ahura Mazda and to emphasise its radiance.[570] This headdress is unique to Bisotun in western Media, and was not replicated on any other Achaemenid monument.

3. Parthian Symbols of Kingship in Neighbouring Kingdoms

The influence of the Parthian royal costume in neighbouring kingdoms is strongly evident in their respective coin iconographies. In the kingdom of Elymais in the south-west of Iran, the local rulers Kamnaskires I and II (c. 147-139 BC) seized the Elymaean throne following the dissolution of Seleucid power.

[569] Soudavar (2009), 428 ff. After Mithradates II, the star and crescent moon appeared on the coinage of Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC) and two of his successors, now hanging above the ruler's portrait (and sometimes interchanged with the image of Nike or a (Varegna?) bird crowning the king with a diadem); see S47-S48, S54, S56. A more detail discussion on Parthian royal imagery that was adapted in the coin iconography of neighbouring (sometimes vassal) kingdoms follows below.
[570] Soudavar (2010a), 119-120.

They struck coinage showing their royal portraits in the style of their former Hellenistic overlords: truncated at the neck with no costume or jewellery elements depicted; a beardless face; cropped, waves of locks; and naturalistic facial features (Figure 56).[571] Following the incorporation of Elymais into the Parthian Empire under Mithradates I in c. 139 BC, infrequent issues of coinage were struck under vassal kings or usurpers; the kingdom seemingly fell out of favour with the Arsacid dynasty after backing Hyspaosines' revolt in nearby Characene and carrying out joint raids in Babylonia until these were brought to an end in 126 BC. In 124 BC, another usurper known as Pittiti was defeated in Elymais.[572] During Mithradates II's reign, no further usurpers seem to have arisen in the kingdom of Elymais, and a lack of numismatic evidence from this region suggests that their minting rights were redacted.

In the midst of the Parthian "Dark Age" when internal dynastic feuds may have weakened the Arsacids' imperial reach, a local Elymaean king known as Kamnaskires III (c. 82/81-73/72 BC) materialised in the region and struck coinage depicting himself and his queen Anzaze in jugate form on the obverse.[573] The style of this king's coin portraits, however, had radically transformed. Now, the king and his queen appeared in a style that was heavily influenced by the Parthian imperial model: the rulers wear costumes decorated in a local style (sometimes with a star embellishment), as well as spiralling torques and earrings; the king appears bearded, and both his hair style and facial hair are depicted in formal segments (Figure 57).[574] From the time of Kamnaskires V (c. 54/53-33/32 BC) and the so-called "Early Arsacid Kings" who ruled in Elymais directly, the motif of a star/sun and crescent moon was included on the obverse of their coinage, suspended above each successive ruler's portrait alongside the Elymaean dynastic anchor symbol (Figure 58).[575] This detail is reminiscent of the star/sun and crescent moon motifs as seen

[571] van't Haaf (2007), types 1-2.
[572] Shayegan (2011), 82-82, 103-104 discusses the relevant records from the *Astronomical Diaries* that describe these events.
[573] McEwan (1986), where the Elymaean king is referred to as Kamnaskires II.
[574] van't Haaf (2007), type 7, particularly 7.1.2 for the star embellishment on the king's costume. See also Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 19-22; *ibid*. (2012a), 75-76.
[575] van't Haaff (2007), types 9 ff.

hanging above the coin portraits of the Arsacids Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC), Phraates IV (c. 38-2 BC) and Phraataces (c. 2 BC – AD 4).[576] This collection of symbols had seemingly become a dynastic emblem for the Arsacid dynasty, connecting the ruling Arsacids to the divine, cosmological world. In later centuries, the Parthian tiara was also adopted under the Elymaean king Orodes II (early-mid 2nd century AD).[577]

In Characene, the influence of the Parthian Empire on this local kingdom of southern Mesopotamia is also apparent from the surviving numismatic material. The coinage of the rebel king Hyspaosines followed the Hellenistic style: in his coin portrait the ruler appears truncated at the neck, wearing no costume or jewellery elements, beardless and with naturalistic facial features (Figure 59). His son and successor, a Parthian vassal known as Apodakos I (c. 124-104/103 BC), struck coinage from c. 110/109 BC and was depicted in a similar fashion, though with a cropped beard showing on his chin (Figure 60).[578] It is not until the reigns of Tiraios II (c. 79/78-49/48 BC) and Attambelos I (c. 47/46-25/24 BC) that a Parthian-influenced style can be recognised within the coin portrait iconography: these rulers are shown with prominent beards; their hairstyle and facial hair are executed in neat spirals of a uniform style (Figure 61).[579]

In the kingdom of Persis in southern Iran, the Parthian costume was adopted on coin portraits in the reign of Vadfradad IV during the 1st century BC (Figure 55).[580] On silver drachms and fractional issues, the king appears wearing a jacket with decorated lapels, a spiralling torque around the neck, and with geometric rows marking his hair and beard. Towards the end of Vadfradad IV's reign and the start of Darev II's, the royal Parthian tiara was also adopted in the portrait iconography, with a central crescent moon motif encased in rows of

[576] See note 569 above.
[577] van't Haaf (2007), 108 ff, types 13.2 ff. See Hansman (1998) [2011] for an overview on the changing relationship between Parthia and Elymais throughout the Parthian period.
[578] Hill (1922), 289, pl. 43.1; regnal dates according to Schuol (2000).
[579] Hill (1922), 290-292, pls. 43.2-3, 45.10-14; regnal dates according to Schuol (2000).
[580] Klose & Müseler (2008), 56 ff, type 4/4 ff. It is still disagreed upon whether Persis was firmly controlled by the Parthian Empire, or whether they retained a stronger degree of independence.

pearls and beaded decoration.[581] Under the later Persid king Napat (1st century AD), the star/sun and crescent moon were used as a central decorative motif on the king's tall tiara.[582] The star/sun and crescent moon symbols were also shown together behind the portrait of Pakor II (1st century AD) on coinage; moreover, under Namopat (1st century AD), a reverse coin design showed the king worshiping before a star/sun and crescent moon.[583]

The powerful impression of Mithradates II's royal image on that of Tigranes II after the latter had been placed on the Armenian throne in 96 BC is evident.[584] Having spent several years in Mithradates II's court as a political hostage, Tigranes II (c. 96-55 BC) returned to his homeland to strike silver tetradrachms and bronze coinage in his own image. His beardless portrait featured an Armenian tiara that held some similar characteristics with the Parthian (Figure 62): a neckflap and check guards can be seen around the king's bust, and a diadem band encircles the base of the tall headdress.[585] The top of the Armenian tiara, however, is radiated with five solar beams; the central decoration shows a star/sun flanked by two eagle-like bird motifs (probably representing the Varegna falcon). Russell equates these symbols with the concepts of royal 'Glory' (*khvarnah*) and 'Fortune' (*baxt*), which are connected to the "luminary of Tīr".[586] Tigranes, furthermore, adopted the title 'King of Kings' on his coinage in c. 85 BC following a series of military victories across various principalities including Media Atropatene, Gordiene, Adiabene and Osrhoene.[587]

The Parthian royal costume was influential even outside the empire's borders. For example, fragments of a wall painting dating to c. 1st century BC, and discovered in KY10 monumental complex at the ancient Chorasmian site of

[581] Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 63; (2007a), 22; *ibid*. (2010), 391; Klose & Müseler (2008), 56-57, types 4/4-8.
[582] Klose & Müseler (2008), 61-62, types 4/46 ff. and subsequent kings; Soudavar (2009), 430; Curtis, V.S. (2015), 28; *ibid*. (2016), 82-84
[583] Klose & Müseler (2008), 58-59, 61, types 4/38, 4/39 ff.
[584] Strabo, 11.14.15. This event is also mentioned in the *Astronomical Diaries*; see Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -95 C obv. 5-7, D obv. 10-11.
[585] Lang (1983), fig. 39b.
[586] Russell (1988), 76 with note 18, 309-310.
[587] Strabo 11.13.2, 11.14.15-16. See Garsoian (2005) [2005] on the history of Tigranes II's reign.

Akchakhan-kala, show a gallery of male portraits. On one particular figure, the lapels of a jacket crossed over into a 'V' shape can be seen, as well as the spirals of a torque ending with a zoomorphic terminal.[588] Kidd has highlighted the parallels of this design with the royal coin portraits of Artabanus I and Mithradates II of Parthia: the Akchakhan-kala figure (like the Parthian kings) is shown wearing his torque in a more schematic rendering across the exposed portion of his chest. The author poses the questions whether these similarities might "indicate a closer level of interaction between [Chorasmia] and Parthia, beyond what one would expect in the context of historical and cultural continuity."[589]

The introduction of the Parthian costume and tiara, decorated with cosmological symbols and bestowing radiance on its wearer, allowed Mithradates II to portray himself using a visual language connected to the divine world. However, this was a visual language that did not rely on the established Hellenistic models that depicted Greek gods in their usual (often nude) anthropomorphised form. By using the symbols of the moon and sun/star, Mithradates II represented his imperial power in motifs that had a long history in the ancient Near East, including iconography of the solar disc of Shamash, the eight-pointed star of Ishtar and the crescent moon of Sin in Mesopotamian religion; and the oral hymns of the Mazdaean religion in which the *yazatas* Mithra, Anahita and Tishtrya embody the radiance of the cosmological creations. The king's appearance was further distanced from Hellenistic portraiture as naturalistic waves of hair were replaced with more uniform rows of curls, and the nose shape was altered to reflect a more eastern appearance. Mithradates II's final coin issues show the king with a long pointed beard depicted in neat rows, a bold protruding nose, a torque ending in a pellet or a magnificent mythical creature, and a tall diademed tiara demonstrating his kingly

[588] Kidd (2011), 246-249, fig.5; see also *ibid*., 262, fig. 19, where the author discusses a figurine found in Akchakhan-kala and represented in a trouser suit, similar to the ubiquitous Parthian costume of the period.
[589] Kidd (2011), 249.

splendour.[590] These items – costume, crown, hair and beard – were the principal features for demonstrating an Iranian king's power and glory. In the Parthian-influenced epic, *Ayadgar-i Zareran,* the vanquished hero Zarir is found by his son, who laments that "the winds have spoilt your crown, hair, and beard; the horses have crushed your clean body with their feet; the dust has covered your garment."[591] On the reverse on Mithradates II's tetradrachms, the usual Greek gods were dispelled in favour of the seated Parthian archer (whose religious resonances will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Three). On the drachm issues, the seated archer gained a more regal appearance – the woven basket or *omphalos* was replaced with an Achaemenid style throne with rounded decorations on the legs, and a footstool inserted below the archer's feet.[592] Under Mithradates II, a new standard of royal iconography emerged for the post-Hellenistic kingdoms of the East. Mithradates II's coin iconography incorporated ideas, symbols and traditions that represented his imperial heartland of Parthian and Media, and resonated with the imperial history of the Ancient Near East.

[590] Compare to the image of Darius I on his tomb relief, with a long beard is carved in neat rows, and wearing a tall cylindrical crown from the Persian tradition; Schmidt (1970), pl. 22.

[591] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §86, translated in Horne (1917), 221. On some coin types from the 1st century BC, the royal Parthian tiara of some kings was countermarked with the portrait of an un-named ruler depicted with a frontal facing bust, and with a man shown facing left and labelled as 'Otanes'; S91.1-5. Furthermore, some Parthian coins were also modified, with parts of the tiara erased on the die; e.g. S34.7-8. These deliberate actions to destroy or conceal the portrayed king's tiara carried out by rivals are indicative of its symbolic function as part of the regalia.

[592] Compare to the image of Darius I enthroned with a footstool beneath his feet at Persepolis; Schmidt (1953), pls. 96-99, 105, 121-123.

- Chapter Three -

ANCESTORS, HEROES AND KINGS

The Ideology behind the Parthian Royal Archer

The seated royal archer, dressed in a riding suit with a Median overcoat draped around his shoulders, wearing a soft leather cap encircled with a diadem, and clasping a bow in his outstretched hand, is the most enduring motif in Parthian monetary history. It appeared continuously on the principal Parthian denomination, the drachm, from the inaugural issue of Arsaces I in the second half of the 3rd century BC, to the final production of Artabanus IV in the first decades of the 3rd century AD.[593] Though the identity of this figure has been much debated in scholarship, what is certain is that the archer is shown wearing a diadem band, and is therefore related to the royal sphere. While immutable, the symbolism behind this dynastic motif undoubtedly evolved over time as the early Parthian state of Arsaces I was steadily transformed into a power empire under later kings.

Graeco-Roman sources recognised the bow as the favoured weapon of the Parthian people in general, and specifically of individual tribes and communities.[594] The bow was, moreover, regarded as the personal weapon of Parthian royals. Cassius Dio reports that in 36 BC, Mark Anthony's legates met with Phraates IV to negotiate a peace treaty. These legates held council with the Parthian king who was "seated on a golden *diphros* stool and plucking the string of his bow".[595] Later in AD 66 during Tiridates I's visit to Rome, the Parthian

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[593] From the time of Mithradates II, the Parthian archer was also displayed on the large silver tetradrachms from the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; several of Mithradates II's successors continued to display this motif on the tetradrachms until the second half of the 1st century BC. Bronze coinage was also frequently struck with the archer's attributive bow displayed in a bow case; see Chapter Four.

[594] Justin, 41.2.5-7; Strabo, 11.8.6 (Massagetae), 11.13.6 (Medians), 15.3.18-19 (Persids and Cardaces), and 16.1.18 (Cossaeans).

[595] Cassius Dio, 49.27.4. Fowler, R. (2005), 147-148 argues that Cassio Dio's description of Phraates IV plucking his bowstring portrayed the king as part of a "tableau", performing an action that

prince reputedly shot two bulls with a single arrow at a gladiatorial exhibition.[596] Roman coinage also used the imagery of the mounted archer to represent the fearsome warriors that were encountered in battles with the Parthian army. Quintus Labienus, a Roman general who was aided by the Parthian army in the Liberator's civil war against Mark Anthony and Octavian, struck coinage under the title 'Parthicus' and displayed on them a Parthian horse saddled and armed with a bow case (Figure 67). Two decades later, Augustus struck denarii that commemorated the return in 20 BC of the Roman standards that had been captured in wars against the Parthians. Depicted on these issues was a kneeling Parthian figure offering the standard out before him, dressed in a trouser suit and overcoat or cloak in a style that is evocative of the iconic Parthian archer motif on Arsacid coinage (Figure 70).[597]

Recent numismatic studies have sought to move beyond the caricatures of eastern despots and barbarians that are presented in the Graeco-Roman imagination. Instead, discussion on the Parthian seated archer has been orientated towards an eastern (and specifically, Parthian) perspective in order to better recognise the significance behind this figure. The examined material in the first two chapters of this thesis indicates that the Parni ancestors of the Arsacids had been connected to the wider Iranian world during the Achaemenid period, when the power of the Persian king stretched into the territory of the Dahae and various Saka tribes of the north-east. The Achaemenid kings regarded the bow (a weapon that was also ubiquitous in these regions) as a symbol of their royalty. Centuries later, Mithradates II fashioned himself as the

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symbolised Arsacid kingship and that was instantly recognised as the same action performed by the seated archer holding the bow extended outwards on Arsacid coinage. Lerner (2017), 5 has disputed Fowler's argument on the basis that Cassius Dio's passage is a unique description, and no parallel examples can be found to support idea that the plucking of a bowstring was specificly evocative of the Arsacid kings.

[596] Cassius Dio, 63.3.1-2.

[597] The Roman standards had been captured when Parthia won a significant victory against the Romans at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC. It was reported that 10,000 captive Romans had been rounded up and deported to Margiana in the far north-east of the Parthian Empire. Plutarch's *Life of Crassus* provides an account of this war and its outcomes. More Roman standards were captured by the Parthian army in later battles led by Decidius Saxa in Syria (40 BC) and Marc Antony in Media Atropatene (36 BC). See also Figure 71, a second denarius type (also struck on golden aurei) that depicted Augustus' triumphal Parthian Arch topped by a quadriga and flanked by two Parthian figures, one armed with a bow, and both raising returned Roman standards towards the victorious quadriga; RIC 1, Augustus types 134-137, 287-289, 304-305, 314-315.

inheritor of the Achaemenid imperial legacy by adopting the title 'King of Kings', and across his silver coin denominations he struck the image of the iconic Parthian archer seated on an Achaemenid-style high-backed throne. By tracing the royal archer's past contexts and transformations, it is possible to gain a richer understanding of its ideological implications in Parthian culture. The bow was a powerful symbol in the art of the ancient Near East, permeating across the spheres of mythology and religion, representing experiences of conflict and war, and embodying the power of the victorious king who conquers and maintains order with this weapon.

I. The Royal Archer in Ancient Near Eastern Tradition

As the Arsacid kings expanded their kingdom across the Iranian Plateau, the image of the seated archer on drachms became symbolic of their spreading power. Of course, these were not the first archer coins to have been minted in the East. Under the Seleucid regime, the image of the patron deity Apollo Toxotes ('the Archer') testing an arrow was struck widely on coinage across the Upper Satrapies (Figure 44). The Seleucids were the first to mint coinage in these easternmost regions of ancient Iran, setting a precedent for the ensuing Arsacid administration regarding coin iconography and subject matter.

Similarly in centuries preceding the Seleucid Empire, the Achaemenids produced coinage in the imperial mints of Asia Minor showing the royal hero braced for battle with spear and bow (Figure 33).[598] Introduced by Darius I at the end of the 6th century BC, the golden darics depicting this royal hero became known colloquially by Greek coin handlers as *toxotai* 'archers'.[599] The theme of the royal archer was reiterated on satrapal coinage; staters struck in Tarsus under Tarkamuwa display a seated archer clothed in cavalry dress and testing an arrow between his fingers (Figure 34).[600] The circulation of these imperial

[598] While hoard evidence suggests that Achaemenid coinage was minted exclusively in Asia Minor, Alexander the Great's striking of double darics further east (perhaps at Babylon) may indicate that coin production had been established here already under the former Persian kings; see Alram (1994) [2011] 'Daric' for a summary of the discussion.
[599] Plutarch *Artaxerxes*, 20.4; *idem. Agesilaus*, 15.6.
[600] Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 9, fig. 5.

and satrapal coinages was principally confined to Asia Minor; nevertheless, some issues were conveyed eastwards and are thought to have been found, for example, at the temple site of Takht-i Kuwad in ancient Bactria.[601]

Predating the Achaemenid period, images of kings armed with a bow had been carved into Assyrian, Elamite and Egyptian reliefs, showing the royal warriors in the throws of battle or out hunting.[602] Although pictorial evidence from the Median period is extremely limited, a cylinder seal excavated at Tepe Nush-i Jan (near Malayer, Hamadan Province) shows an archer figure drawing an arrow next to a large snake in a Neo-Assyrian artistic style.[603] These examples further demonstrates the pervasive tradition of the 'archer king' across cultures of the ancient Near East.[604] As the inheritors of the imperial legacy in ancient Iran and Mesopotamia, the Parthians and their seated archer motif cannot be examined in isolation of these earlier cultures, but as a continuation of an older tradition revisited through Arsacid eyes.

1. The Seleucid Archer

Under the Seleucid regime, a nude Apollo Toxotes, seated on an omphalos, testing an arrow or bundle of arrows in his hands and with a bow resting at his feet became the emblematic image on the imperial coinage of the Upper Satrapies. Antiochus I (co-regent in Bactria from c. 292 BC, and sole ruler from 281-261 BC) was first to introduce this motif on Seleucid coinage, replacing the customary image of Zeus that had adorned his father's coinage and that of Alexander the Great before him (Figures 35, 38, 44).[605] Alongside

[601] See pp. 129, 192.
[602] Iossif (2011), 252-254.
[603] Curtis, J. (1984), 25, fig. 4, no. 236.
[604] See also Razmjou (2005b), 283-284 on Achaemenid period depictions of Medians with the bow, particularly the royal weapon holder who is dressed in the Median costume. On the bow in other ancient Near Eastern traditions: see Potts (1999), 263, 268, 277, 290, 345 with bibliography on the continuity of the Elamite bow in the Assyrian and Achaemenid periods; Curtis, J. & Tallis (2005), 71, 86, figs. 27-28, 51 on depictions of the Elamite bow with the duck head decoration in the art of the Achaemenid palaces; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 108-110 on the bow as depicted on Achaemenid seals.
[605] Iossif (2010); *ibid*. (2011), 248-250, 257-258; Erikson (2011), 52; Lerner (2017), 13. Erikson argues that Antiochus I introduced the Apollo Toxotes design in c. 288 BC during his co-regency in Bactria. Preceding this, Apollo had been depicted exclusively as a prophetic god on Seleucid coinage

this iconographic development, the dynastic myth of Seleucus I's descent from Apollo was created (most likely as part of Antiochus I's propaganda strategy).[606] By these means, Apollo became the tutelary deity of the Seleucid dynasty, and the protector of the Seleucids' subjects. The family's patron god was struck on silver issues across the network of eastern mints, demonstrating the imperial authority of the Seleucid king and the coined wealth that he commanded.[607] Moreover, the widespread image of Apollo Toxotes on these issues propagated the divine legitimacy that was enjoyed by the ruling Hellenistic family, since the god was now considered to have fathered the dynasty's founder.

The portrayal of Apollo explicitly as an archer god was a conscious choice on behalf of Antiochus I, who descended from a Macedonian father (Seleucus I) and an Iranian mother (Apama - notably the daughter of the Bactrian noble Spitamenes).[608] This deity was clearly recognisable to the Asiatic Greek subjects of the Seleucid Empire, even if the image of Apollo with a bow was less common in the coin iconography compared to the god's more usual attributes.[609] The divine image and its emphasis on the bow, however, could also appeal to eastern sensibilities, particularly the royal archer of the earlier Achaemenid tradition.[610] Like his Achaemenid predecessor (who encompassed notions of kingship, legendary heroism and divinely granted prowess), the Apollo Toxotes of the Seleucids intertwined ideas about their political legitimacy and their divine *syggeneia* or 'kinship' with the god. Iossif summarises, "It was [Antiochus I] who found a way to inscribe the Seleukids in

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alongside the tripod (an attribute of Apollo and a symbol his prophetic powers) that was struck widely struck on bronze coinage; see Iossif (2011), 263-264, table 3.

[606] See the western sources Justin, 15.4.2-9 and Appian *Syriaca*, 63. The letter OGIS 227 inscribed at Didyma on the Ionian coast in c. 246 BC from Seleucus II to the Milesians is the earliest written testimony of this dynastic myth of descent. See also the inscription OGIS 212 from Ilion, Asia Minor in which Apollo is named as the founder of the Seleucid family - discussed in greater detail in Iossif (2011), 243-248.

[607] See Iossif (2011), 265, table 4.

[608] Arrian *Anabasis*, 7.4.6; Plutarch *Demetrius*, 31.3. The intermarriage of the Macedonian Seleucus and the Bactrian Apama had a significant influence on the structure of the Seleucid Empire. A royal court was established at Bactria for Antiochus I as co-regent in c. 292 BC, during his father's reign. From this seat of power, Antiochus I administered the fortification of borders and cities, and founded several urban sites across the Upper Satrapies; Appian, *Syriaca*, 62; Strabo, 11.10.2; Pliny the Elder, 6.47-48, 93; Houghton & Lorber (2002), 111.

[609] See note 605 above.

[610] Iossif (2011), 257-258.

the eastern tradition of divine kingship by claiming descent from Apollo and by portraying him as the divine Toxotes ['Archer']."[611]

Some scholarship has sought to equate Antiochus I's Apollo with indigenous deities of the ancient Near East. His Mesopotamian counterparts include the sun god Shamash, and the god of wisdom Nabû.[612] The earliest attestation of a syncretism between Apollo and an Iranian deity is found in the trilingual inscription of the Xanthian sanctuary of Leto on the southwest coast of Asia Minor, dated to the 4th century BC.[613] In the Aramaic version of the inscription, the Greek Apollo is understood as the Iranian *ḥštrpty* (Old Ir. *x*šaθra-pati-* 'Master of the Kingdom', a title associated with Mithra). In the east of the Seleucid Empire, Apollo seems to have been generously integrated into the native religious landscape. Pliny the Elder comments that Demodamas, a satrap in Bactria during the reigns of Seleucus I and Antiochus I, erected altars dedicated to Apollo along the Jaxartes River (Syr Darya).[614] Antiochus I also completed various building projects in the east of the empire, notably dedicating a temple at the Bactrian city of Ai Khanoum to Apollo (later built over by Antiochus III in c. 208-206 BC), and indeed a cultic statue of Apollo was discovered in the excavations of the ancient city.[615]

Other material evidence from this region during the period of the Graeco-Bactrian kings suggests that a connection was drawn between Apollo-Helios and Mithra through solar iconography.[616] The image of a radiate Helios driving a four-horse chariot was depicted on the reverse design of Plato's (c.

[611] Iossif (2011), 249.
[612] Erickson (2011), 58-59. Nabû, the son of the supreme deity Marduk, was also identified as the god of scribes (who played an important role in the Babylonian literary tradition). He was also associated with divine wisdom, and hence considered to have oracular powers. As the leader of the Muses, Apollo was similarly associated with literacy, and was also recognised as the god of prophecy. The *omphalos* on which Apollo sits on Seleucid coinage was an important symbol of the Apollo's oracle at Delphi. He was, moreover, the son of Zeus (identified in Mesopotamian religion with Marduk).
[613] The inscription from the sanctuary of Leto is published in three parts: Dupont-Sommer (1974); Laroche (1974); Metzer (1974).
[614] Pliny the Elder, 6.49.
[615] Zejmal (1985), fig. 204; Pichikyan (1991), 181-182. Note the study by Litvinskiy (2004), 69 - as cited in Shenkar (2011), 121, note 34 - who argues that the statue does not in fact represent Apollo.
[616] See Shenkar (2014), 106-107 for a summary of the related scholarship on this subject.

145-140 BC) tetradrachm issues.[617] Whether this figure can be interpreted as the Iranian Mithra in this period is uncertain. Nevertheless, after the demise of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom in the second half of the 2nd century BC, images of the radiate gods Miiro (Mithra)-Helios were shown centuries later on the reverse of the Kushan king Kanishka's (c. AD 127-150) gold and copper coin issues (Figure 64), as well as on coins issued by his successor, Huvishka (AD 140-180).[618] Here, the iconography associated with the Greek Helios had been transferred to the native Mithra. Although it cannot be clearly determined when this development began, these material objects from the time of Hellenistic Bactria to the reign of the Kushans has given scholarship reason to argue that the half-Bactrian Antiochus I consciously promoted Apollo in the eastern reaches of the Seleucid Empire as a Greek counterpart to the indigenous Mithra.[619] In Greek and Iranian thought, these respective divine beings are both described as far-shotting archers, and are both connected to the fiery sun.[620] The overlapping associations between solar divinities, archer gods, and divine patronage in the ancient Near East are examined further below.

2. The Achaemenid Archer and the Divine World

The royal archer was introduced on Achaemenid coinage by Darius I (522-486 BC) as part of his economic reforms of the late 6th century BC: gold darics and silver sigloi showed the archer in Persian court costume, bearing a bow and other weaponry such as a quiver, bundles of arrows and, on some coin types, a spear (Figure 33).[621] The ideology behind this royal archer figure resonated in the monumental iconography of Darius I's rock reliefs - in particular, his victory relief from Bisotun and his tomb façade at Naqsh-i Rostam. On these reliefs, the Great King is shown wearing Persian court dress,

[617] Bopearachchi (1991), 74, 220-221 (series 1-3), pl. 24.
[618] Jongeward & Cribb (2015), 269-272. Miiro-Helios was one of the principal deities on the coin issues of this period, and was shown on c. 18% of Kanishka I's gold coinage, and c. 20% of Huvishka's; see Bracey (2012), 203, table 2.
[619] Le Rider & Callataÿ (2006), 45-49; Iossif (2011), 248 ff.; Erickson (2011), 52, note 6; Lerner (2017), 13-14.
[620] E.g. the epithet *ἕκατος* 'far-shooter' in the Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo and to Pythian Apollo; in Yt. 10.102, Mithra is described in warrior form as a "far-shooting archer"; translated by Malandra (1983), 71.
[621] Stronach (1989).

clasping a bow in one hand and raising his other hand towards the Mazdaean winged figure that hovers above. A kingship ring is offered by the winged figure, whose facial feaures mirror those of Darius I, while his other raised hand returns the archer king's gesture. The significance behind this winged symbol for the Achaemenid kings has not survived into the modern era. Known today as the Faravahar, it is thought to have symbolised the supreme god Ahura Mazda bestowing the sacred *khvarnah* on the king who rules according to Truth and Righteousness (Avestan *asha*, or Old Persian *arta*).[622] On the Bisotun monument, Darius I stands victoriously with his foot and bow resting on a defeated rebel who has been thrown to the ground; before the king, nine more defeated rebels stand in procession chained at the neck and hands. On his tomb relief, Darius I stands with his bow at ease, facing a fire altar; the scene is set above an oversized throne that is supported by figures representing the subject nations of the Persian Empire. In these two contexts, Darius I maintains authority and order across his empire through his skills in battle, and through the support of the divine world. The inscription accompanying the tomb relief highlights the king's specific role as the warrior of Ahura Mazda, and the kinds of skills he has been divinely equipped with to carry out the will of the great God:

> "A great god is Ahuramazda… who bestowed wisdom and activity upon Darius the King. Saith Darius the King: By the favor of Ahuramazda I am of such a sort that I am a friend to the right, I am not a friend to the wrong. It is not my desire that the

[622] Notably, the facial features and costume of the winged figure are almost identical to that of the king himself, emphasising the strong connection between kingship and the divine world in Achaemenid ideology. In the inscriptions accompanying Darius I's monumental reliefs, the supreme deity Ahura Mazda is accredited with granting the king his power and right to rule; see, for example, DNb, §7-§8b, §8h. Moreover, in the *Avesta*, Ahura Mazda is known to converse with kings and worshippers. Therefore, since the iconography on Darius I's relief shows the divine winged figure reaching out to the Persian king with the so-called kingship ring, and seemingly conversing with him, it is generally accepted that this symbol represents Ahura Mazda himself. Here he bestows the kingship ring or *khvarnah* on the righteous ruler. Shahbazi (1980) has further proposed that the winged disk showing the divine figure emerging from the top represented the Kayanid *khvarnah* that was reserved for kings, whilst the simplified winged disk without a figure represented the *khvarnah* of the Aryans, desired by ordinary warriors. This distinction was refuted by Lecoq (1984), since both symbols were depicted on the Achaemenid palace in Persepolis; see, in particular, the door jamb illustrated in Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 76, fig. 38. The figureless winged disc seems to have represented the khvarnah in general, and was shown to be housed in the Achaemenid palace; see Soudavar (2010a); *ibid*. (2010b) [2010]. Further discussion on the winged figure of the Achaemenid kings can be found in Duchesne-Guillemin (1979); Root (1979), 169; Calmeyer (1979); *ibid*. (1981), 55; Jamzadeh (1982); Boyce (1982), 96-105; Frye (1984), 177; Vanden Berghe (1988); Soudavar (2010a); *ibid*. (2010b) [2010].

> weak man should have wrong done to him by the mighty; nor is that my desire, that the mighty man should have wrong done to him by the weak […]
>
> […] Trained am I both with hands and with feet. As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback."[623]

In this theological testament, Darius I visualises himself as the holder of the *khvarnah*, and hence a divinely chosen agent who upholds a*sha* across his imperial sphere in the same way that Ahura Mazda rules the universe through *asha*.[624] Interrelated political and religious ideologies are at the heart of the Achaemenid king's depiction as a royal archer - both on monumental works, where he is shown victorious and maintaining order over many nations with his bow at ease, and on coin issues, where he is shown as a combatant in action ready with bow and spear.[625] He represents a destroyer of rebellion, disorder and malignance, and maintains what is righteous in the eyes of Ahura Mazda.[626]

This relationship between the archer king and the supreme God was similarly represented on coins minted by the regional satraps during the Achaemenid period. The silver stater minted by Tarkamuwa (formerly Datames), general and satrap of Cilicia, shows a seated figure (interpreted by some as the satrap himself, by others as the Achaemenid king) wearing a Median overcoat or *kandys*, tunic, trousers and soft cap, testing an arrow in one

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[623] DNb §7-§8b, §8h, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 140.

[624] Y. 1.1; Yt. 1, 13, 15 Ahura Mazda names himself as the King and Sovereign "who rules at his will… who rules most at his will", above any other being or mortal king.

[625] Further images of Achaemenid royal archer battling enemies and monsters can be seen on seals, e.g. Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 94, figs. 74-75 and Razmjou (2005a), 158-159, fig. 202; on decorative vessels, e.g. Simpson (2005), 118, fig. 111; on costume ornaments, e.g. Tallis (2005), 221, fig. 396; and on weaponry, e.g. Tallis (2005), 233, fig. 431. Glazed brick decorations from the Palace of Susa depict royal guards (perhaps from the king's personal bodyguard known as the 'Immortals') bearing spears and bows, and embody the importance of these weapons in Iranian warrior culture; Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 87, fig. 51.

[626] The same ideological vein runs clearly through the religious hymns of the Zoroastrin religion: compare Yt. 19.93, "[The *khvarnah*]… that King Vishtaspa bore when he victoriously maintained holiness against the host of the fiends and took off the Druj from the world of the good principle"; and Darius I's inscription at Bisotun (DB IV, §63), translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 132: "Saith Darius the King: For this reason Ahuramazda bore aid, and the other gods who are, because I was not hostile, I was not a Lie-follower, I was not a doer of wrong – neither I nor my family. According to righteousness I conducted myself […]".

hand, and with a composite double curved bow at his feet (Figure 34). This bow contrasts with the simple bow known from the Achaemenid coin and rock relief examples cited above (compare with Figure 33). As outlined earlier, the composition of this satrapal coin emission has led some to believe that it was the prototype for the later Seleucid seated Apollo issues, as well as the Parthian seated archer issues.[627] On Tarkamuwa's stater, the Mazdaean winged disc hovers above the scene of the seated archer, emphasising the divine potency behind this figure. The winged disc, here shown without the figure emerging from the centre, has been interpreted as the *khvarnah* itself that is sought out by Iranian kings and heroes.[628]

Another motif in Achaemenid period iconography that promotes the king as the holder of the *khvarnah* is that of the royal falcon. One of the best-known examples of this symbol can be found on a lapis lazuli plaque discovered at Persepolis in which the bird, with its wings spread, holds a kingship ring or pearl in each talon to represent the resplendent *khvarnah*.[629] Found amongst the riches of the Oxus Treasure, a similar design on a golden clothing appliqué displays a falcon with its wings spread and with a kingship ring above its beak.[630] In the sacred *Yashts* of the Mazdaean religion, this falcon is known as the Varegna bird.[631] In its feathers it transports the *khvarnah*, bestowing this on righteous kings; and if the king succumbs to the Lie, the Varegna bird flees to the protection of the *yazata* Mithra.[632] The Varegna bird also appears as one of the incarnations of Verethragna, who, as the *yazata* of 'Strength' and 'Smiting of Resistance', aids righteous kings in their triumphs.[633] In this bird form, Verethragna flies "seizing from below (with his talons), crushing (?) from above (with his beak), […] the fastest of birds, the swiftest of those that fly north. He

[627] Zeimal (1982); Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 66; *ibid*. (2007b), 414-417; *ibid*. (2012a), 68; de Jong (2003); Lerner (2017), 6.
[628] See note 622 above.
[629] Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 95, fig. 77. See also Soudavar (2010a), 123-125 on the Varegna bird and the *khvarnah*.
[630] Curtis, J. (2005b), 146, fig. 185.
[631] Shahbazi (1984), 314-315 discusses the survival of the word for 'falcon' or 'hawk' (or 'royal falcon' in some contexts) in Sogdian as w'rγn'y, w'r'γn'y or w'rγn'k, (to read wārayнay- < vārayna-ka) and in Chorasmian as w'rγn'k. See Parpola (2002), 305-310 on the importance of the bird-of-prey in Central Asian (and the wider Near Eastern) culture and religion.
[632] Yt. 19.34-36, 38.
[633] Yt. 14.3.

alone among living beings (can) overtake the flight of an arrow".[634] The comparison of a divine being's flight to that of a swift arrow occurs also in the *Tishtar Yasht*, where Tishtrya's flight in likened to the supernatural arrow shot by Erekhsha – a hero who was later associated with the Arsacid dynasty in the *Shahnameh* epic (discussed in greater detail below).[635] These comparisons highlight the cultural importance of archery in ancient Iran, particularly as a skill of kings and heroes who are supported by the divine world in their battles to claim the *khvarnah*.

The image of the falcon and its divine symbolism are represented in the iconic Mazdaean winged figure that hovers above the royal archer in Achaemenid art. The *khvarnah*-carrying feathers of the Varegna bird emerge from the circular disc, at the centre of which is the divine figure that presents the kingship ring to the Persian ruler. As the recipient of the *khvarnah*, the king is instilled with supreme skill in wielding the bow, through which he conquers lands and maintains order according to the will of Ahura Mazda.

3. Pre-Achaemenid Archers and Gods

Much of the Achaemenid iconography surrounding the divine winged figure, the powerful falcon, and the king as an archer-warrior was inherited from cultures that were conquered and absorbed into the Persian Empire over the course of the 6th and 5th centuries BC. The adaption of these motifs across time and cultures demonstrates their immense visual power in ancient Near Eastern thought. Prototypes for the Achaemenids' iconography can be found principally in the art of the ancient Egyptian pharaohs and the Assyrian kings. An overview of the deep-rooted resonances behind these powerful motifs is important when considering how later iterations of the iconography were received in subsequent centuries during the time of the Arsacid kings.

[634] Yt. 14.19-20.
[635] Yt. 8.6, 37.

An image of a falcon's feathered wings emerging from a solar disc has been identified in Egyptian art as early as the 26th century BC.[636] A stone stele carved two millennia later during the Hellenistic period features the same motif suspended above Alexander the Great, who is depicted in the style of a pharaoh.[637] The longevity of the Egyptian winged solar disc demonstrates how deep-rooted this symbol was in the ideology of the region, and its continued relevance under foreign kings both Persian and Macedonian as a protective icon. The falcon was understood as an incarnation of Horus, a Sky god who cradles the Sun, as well as the god of War and Hunting.[638] A Greek text authored by Aelian in the 3rd century describes the falcon's inverted flight, which allows the bird to stare directly at the sun as it hunts its prey, undazzled by the "divine fire".[639] The author further mentions that the supreme bird is sacred to the god Horus, the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek Apollo. A 5th century treatise in Greek (thought to be a translation of a work written by an Egyptian priest known as Horapollo[640]) discusses the Egyptian hieroglyph for 'Falcon', stating that the extraordinary bird "seems to be an image of the sun, being capable of looking towards its rays despite all other winged creatures."[641] Due to its superior hunting skills, Horapollo explains, the falcon is associated with "Excellence" and "Victory". The similarities between the Egyptian falcon and the Varegna bird are very apparent. In the *Yasht* 14, Verethragna (representing Victory and Strength) soars in the shape of the Varegna bird "seizing from below (with his talons), crushing (?) from above (with his beak)".[642] His epithets specifically describe the *yazata* as *hvarə.darəsa* 'looking at the sun' and *āsišta* 'swiftest [of all the birds]'.[643] The hieroglyph for 'king', Horapollo states later in his account, incorporates the image of the falcon: just as the bird or prey is set apart by flying higher than any other bird and is ruthless in its hunting, so too is the king set apart above others and powerfully defeats his enemies.[644] As

[636] Frankfort (1939), 207-215; *ibid*. (1954), 66-67; Boyce (1982), 37-38.
[637] British Museum, AES 1697/1719; Razmjou (2005a), 173.
[638] Stricker (1964), 310-311 with further bibliography on falcon symbolism in Egypt.
[639] Aelian *De Natura Animalium*, 10.14.
[640] The syncretism between Apollo and Horus is reflected especially in the name of this priest.
[641] Horapollo *Hieroglyphica*, 1.6.
[642] Yt. 14.19.
[643] Stricker (1964), 310.
[644] Horapollo *Hieroglyphica*, 2.56.

outlined above, the Varegna bird is also connected to kingship in the Iranian tradition, as it transports the divine *khvarnah* to and from kings.[645]

The falcon in Egyptian art presides over the realms of hunting, battle and victory; it thrives above all other living beings; and it is allied to the "divine fire" that is the Sun through the god Horus. Depicted in its natural avian form and as the symbolic winged solar disc, the falcon functions as a protector of the king, who embodies the bird's special characteristics – a supreme and victorious warrior, elevated above others, and empowered by the divine cosmos.[646] In appropriating the winged symbol of the Egyptians, the Achaemenid kings absorbed these powerful ideas and expressed their own supremacy in an Iranian context. In the art of the Persian kings, the divine winged disc with a figure at the centre is suspended protectively above the ruler, offering the kingship ring as a symbol of the *khvarnah*. On Darius I's monuments at Bisotun and Naqsh-i Rustam, the Persian king mirrors the imposing attributes of the falcon or Varegna bird: he is shown above all other living beings (i.e. the defeated and chained rebels at Bisotun, or the throne bearers at Naqsh-i Rustam); he is skilled in battle, as demonstrated by the bow, and reaps victory with this royal weapon; and he is supported by the presence of the divine winged symbol.

When the Assyrian Empire conquered the Egyptian Kingdom in the 2nd millennium BC, the winged solar disc was also absorbed into the art of the victorious kings.[647] Under the Mesopotamian rulers, the winged symbol underwent various transformations that would later influence the Achaemenid version showing the divine figure emerging from the centre. For the Assyrians, the special bond between the divine world and the king was emphasised in the winged symbol with the addition of a horned figure emerging from the central disc. The figure is usually shown in front of solar rays, sometimes holding a bow

[645] Yt. 14.20; Yt. 19.34-36, 38.
[646] Stricker (1964), 313.
[647] Boyce (1982), 96 suggests that this symbol may have already been adopted by the Median Deiocid kings of the 7th-6th centuries BC. See also Frankfort (1939), 208-210, and Winter, I.J. (2009), 191-193 on the adoption of the winged disc across other nations in the ancient Near East, including the Hittites and Phoenicians.

before him or a kingship ring. This figure is understood as the sun god Shamash or the supreme god Ashur.[648] His divine profile strongly resembles that of the Assyrian king, who is often shown drawing a bow against his enemies or hunting bulls and lions in the scenes below.[649] The winged figure, moreover, raises his free hand in a gesture that is echoed by Achaemenid iterations of the motif in later centuries. The Assyrian scenes establish that order has been restored by the king over enemies and beasts under the protective power of the divine winged symbol.[650]

The Achaemenid kings carried forward these powerful symbols and emboldened them with their own ideology centred on Ahura Mazda as the supreme creator and royal benefactor. While the winged figure motif could resonate with Egyptian and Mesopotamian subjects, it was now also a definitively Achaemenid device.[651] The wings of the symbol reverberated with a deep-rooted ideology surrounding the falcon in the ancient Near East, and specifically conjured ideas about the Avestan Varegna bird, which carries the *khvarnah* between the heavenly world and the Achaemenid king in its feathers. The divine symbol's association with the Varegna bird, moreover, connected it to the *yazata* Verethragna who represents 'Strength' and the 'Smiting of Resistance'. Accordingly, the Achaemenid kings were cast as victorious figures in their monumental reliefs, upheld by subject throne bearers or presiding over

[648] Mackenzie (1915), 347; Frankfort (1939), 210-212; *ibid*. (1954), 66-67; Boyce & Grenet (1991), 104, notes 196, 198; Soudavar (2010b).

[649] For example, the series of wall panels from the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II (883-859 BC). On these wall panels, winged figures preside over the king, bestowing abundance on him as the royal archer and as commander-in-chief; see Porter (2010), 150; Iossif (2011), 253-255.

[650] Frankfort (1939), 212.

[651] A specific example from the Suez region in Egypt epitomises this transmission of power behind the winged symbol into Achaemenid hands. On the Chalouf stele, the winged disc is shown at the top. The inscription (written in Old Persian, Elamite and Egyptian) demonstrates the strength of the Persian king and his god Ahura Mazda over Egypt (DZc, §1, §3), translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 147: "A great god is Ahuramazda… who made Darius king, who upon Darius the King this kingdom, great, possessed of good horses, possessed of good men [….] Saith Darius the King: I am a Persian; from Persia, I seized Egypt [...]" A similar argument may be made of the relief of Sar-i Pol-i Zahab in Luristan (not too distant from Bisotun), dating to the Isin-Larsa period (c. 2004–1763 BC), and displaying King Anubanini of the Lullubi standing victoriously with his bow before chained captives, while the goddess Inanna/Ishtar hovers before him offering a kingship ring. Scholarship has noted the great similarities between this relief, and that of Darius I at Bisotun; see Potts (1999), 318, fig. 9.3 with bibliography. Darius I's victory relief at Bisotun assimilates many aspects of the Sar-i Pol-i Zahab relief, and frames the Persian king as the heir to this tradition.

prisoners of war.[652] The winged figure's association with the sun in the traditions of Egypt and Assyria has interesting resonances in Mazdaean ideology. The winged disc was understood as the embodiment of the sun-gazing falcon that was sacred to Horus-Apollo, and as the manifestation of the sun god Shamash. Although the supreme god Ahura Mazda is the creator of the Sun, the *yazata* Mithra is a firm ally of this creation. Like the ever-watchful Sun that passes across the world, Mithra is ever-watchful of the oaths uttered in the earthly world, particularly those of kings who vow to rule righteously.[653] Mithra is also strongly linked to sacred Fire (Atar), a medium through which thoughts, words and deeds are judged.[654] The divine Fire is present on the tomb reliefs of the Achaemenid kings, burning in a fire holder before the king and below the protection of the winged figure. Finally, Mithra is also referred to in *Yasht* 19 as the most endowed with the *khvarnah*, defending this sacred entity against all evil beings.[655] In this martial role to destroy the enemies of Iran, Mithra is described as "[possessing] white horses (and) spears with sharp points and long shafts, the far-shooting archer, the warrior manifesting his youthful strength, whom Ahura Mazdā appointed as guardian and supervisor over the prosperity of the whole world".[656] He reflects, in divine form, the Persian king's role of protecting the empire using his divinely given skills in spearmanship and bowmanship, both of foot and on horseback.[657] Under the reign of Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC), Mithra was invoked alongside Ahura Mazda (and sometimes with Anahita) for the protection of the king.[658] It is possible that the winged figure in Achaemenid art was also associated with Mithra as a divine supporter of the

[652] See Luschey (1968), pl. X for Darius I's earliest monument from Bisotun, where the king is shown holding the royal bow victoriously before nine chained rebels; for Darius I's tomb relief at Naqsh-i Rustam where the king stands holding the royal bow before a fire altar on an over-sized throne supported by his subject nations, see Schmidt (1970), pl. 19. The winged figure hovers above both scenes.
[653] *Yt*. 10.7.
[654] On Mithra and the ordeal by Fire, see Boyce (1975a) [1996], 35-36.
[655] Yt. 19.35
[656] Yt. 10.102-103, translated in Malandra (1983), 71.
[657] DNb, §8h.
[658] A²Ha, A²Hb, A²Sa, A²Sd; see Kent (1950) [1953], 154-155.

king and his court, particularly when displayed in the presence of the king and the sacred Fire.[659]

An understanding of the deep-rooted traditions behind the motif of the royal archer is necessary when examining the re-emergence of this theme under the Arsacid kings. The longevity of these iconographic elements (the royal archer, and the related winged figure and falcon imagery) demonstrates the power that these atavistic images held in the ancient Near East over the themes of kingship and divine patronage. The almost century-long hiatus in which parts of ancient Iran were governed by Hellenistic kings (from Alexander's conquest of Persia in 330 BC and easternmost campaigns in 327/326 BC, to the local uprisings in Persis, Parthia and Bactria in the mid-3rd century BC) did little to subvert the longstanding significance of these motifs. In fact, the Asiatic Hellenistic kings often drew from this iconographic tradition and ideology (such as the introduction of the far-shooter Apollo Toxotes as the dynastic patron of the Seleucid dynasty under Antiochus I – a development that is indicative of the dynasty's pivot towards imagery that could resonate with ancient Near Eastern ideas on kingship and the divine world). When the Parni leader Arsaces I invaded the Parthian satrapy, he would have certainly had some perspective on the long-standing iconographic traditions of the wider Iranian world. The victorious invader understood the potency of depicting a bowman in Iranian dress on his coin issues. His successor, Arsaces II, also included a falcon, perhaps the Varegna bird, at the archer's feet, which is discussed in further detail below (Figure 4).[660] The use of the archer and falcon imagery on Parthian coinage, and its later transformations, gives expression to the dynasty's developing ideology centred on the *khvarnah* and its ancestral ties to earlier imperial powers of the ancient Near East.

II. Post-Hellenistic Iran and the New Iranian Kings

[659] In the Avestan hymns, Mithra and Verethragna are allied in their protection of the *khvarnah* as it flies away from king Yima in the shape of the Varegna bird (the incarnation of Verethragna) and to the protection of Mithra in Yt. 19.35; see pp. 185-186 above.
[660] S6.

The regional coinages that were struck from the mid-3rd century BC in Persis and Parthia allow scholars to compare the rise of these two localised kingdoms within the Seleucid-Hellenistic sphere. While the *frataraka* rulers in Persis emerged in south-western Iran (Fars Province), the Arsacid kings took root in the north-east (Khorasan Province/modern southern Turkmenistan). These two Iranian dynasties produced coinages that resonated with native identity, ideology and iconography. Aspects of their respective coinages mirrored universal Iranian concepts (such as the royal archer and the *khvarnah*), due to the enduring influence of their most recent Iranian ancestors, the Achaemenids, who had maintained an extensive imperial network from the palaces of Persepolis to the administrative satrapies of the Saka. However, the distinct typologies of Persid and Parthian coinage also reflect more regional traditions on the concepts of kingship, legitimacy and power. These regional variations perhaps serve as a good indicator of how two distinct ruling houses made sense of past ideologies and their associated artistic motifs.

1. The Royal Archer of the Frataraka in Persis

The rulers of Persis, after seizing their independence from the Seleucid overlords, struck an iconography on their coinage that strongly resonated with scenes depicted on the Achaemenid royal tombs carved high into the rock face at Naqsh-i Rustam.[661] The ruler Bagadat (3rd century BC) struck two distinct designs on the reverse of his silver tetradrachm and drachm types. One type showed the Persid ruler sitting on an ornate throne in the style of an Achaemenid king and holding a flower and sceptre; a battle standard stands before Bagadat's throne (Figure 53). The second type showed the ruler worshipping before a raised building with two large doors and crenelated towers; this is interpreted by some scholars as a representation of a religious structure, such as a fire temple (Figure 52).[662] In these two types, Bagadat is

[661] The chronology of the Persid kings follows Klose & Müseler (2008).

[662] Klose & Müseler (2008), 34-35, types 2/1-5. Later Persid silver coin types show the king worshipping before a fire altar; Klose & Müseler (2008), 56-59, types 4/4-23. On the identification of the so-called "fire temple" structure depicted on Persid coinage, see Klose & Müseler (2008), 21 ff.; Curtis, V.S. (2010), 390 with bibliography; as well as Stronach (1966), 219; Callieri (1998), 29-33 &

clothed in Persian robes; on the latter design, he holds a bow at ease with one end resting on the ground in the style of the ancestral Persian kings, with his empty hand is raised before the "fire temple" in a gesture of reverence. On both the obverse portrait and reverse depictions of the ruler, he wears the soft cap that is usually associated with cavalry dress tied with a diadem band. The style of headdress is significantly similar to the coin portraits of the satrapal rulers of the Achaemenid period.[663] On coins of Vadfradad I (c. late 3rd century BC), a new detail was incorporated into the reverse design: a winged figure was shown hovering at the top of the scene, with one hand reaching out to return the ruler's gesture. The battle standard seen on Bagadat's earlier tetradrachm types of the enthroned ruler was shown prominently to the right of the "fire temple" structure (Figure 54).[664] On the coins of his successor, Vadfradad II (c. 2nd century BC), a falcon perches above the standard. The connection to the Avestan Varegna bird is clear.[665] Verethragna, who takes the form of this divine bird in *Yasht* 14, is also known as the *yazata* who carries standard-bearing armies to victory.[666] Furthermore, a falcon also appears perched on top of the diademed soft cap on coin portraits of Vadfradad II, bringing to mind the passage in *Yasht* 19, "the Xwarənah turned away from regal Yima… in the form of a falcon".[667] In the hymn to Verethragna, it is also said that the feathers of the divine falcon can be used as a talisman to ward off evil and protect the *khvarnah* that is held by their wearer.[668] The early coin issues of the *frataraka* owe much to the Achaemenid monumental reliefs of earlier centuries. However, the *frataraka* coinage puts a new emphasis on the victory of their independence, and their

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Potts (2007), who compare this building to the Achaemenid Ka'ba Zardusht and Zendan-i Sulaiman structures at Naqsh-i Rustam and Pasargadae respectively. Potts (2007) further concludes on pp. 296-297 that the image of the structure was simply "a freestanding building type known from Pasargadae and Naqsh-e Rustam, the precise function of which they [the *frataraka*] may have been quite ignorant. Yet even if Baydad [Bagadat] and Vadfradad [I] were no longer sure of the function of the Ka'ba and Zendan, the Ka'ba, in particular, situated in the shadow of the royal tombs of by then legendary figures like Darius and Xerxes, from whom they had inherited what was left of the Persian realm, may well have had an ideological significance which transcended any utilitarian view of what the building had originally been used for."

[663] Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 416-417, figs. 5-6 highlights the soft caps worn by the satraps Tissaphernes and Autophradates – the Greek version of the Iranian name Vadfradad (4th century BC).

[664] Klose & Müseler (2008), 36-37, types 2.8.4

[665] de Jong (2003), 193-195; Curtis, V.S. (2010), 389-390; *ibid*. (2015), 26-27.

[666] Yt. 14.62.

[667] Yt. 19.34-36, 38; translated in Malandra (1983), 91.

[668] Yt. 14.35-36.

newly gained *khvarnah*: the soft cap alludes to the new local governance in Persis in the style of the former Persian regional rulers and satraps, while the image of the falcon perched on the battle standard and on the royal portrait of Vadfradad II speaks of their divinely aided victory and legitimacy.[669]

Finally, the title in Aramaic adopted by the Persid rulers on their coin issues (*frataraka i bayān*, 'Frataraka of the Gods') further emphasises the new political context in which these local rulers came to power. While the title '*frataraka*' had been used in the Achaemenid period to denote a provincial administrative official of the empire, the Persid rulers re-established this term to demarcate themselves as independent rulers separate from the wider Seleucid Empire (perhaps similar to Arsaces I's titles 'Autocrat' and '*karenos*', on his early coin issues from around the same period).[670] Moreover, the grand declaration that the Persid rulers were the *frataraka* ruling on behalf of the gods (or at least on behalf of their deified ancestor kings) portrayed them as the rightful locutors with the divine world, and holders of the divinely granted *khvarnah*.[671] While the Achaemenid Darius I had subdued rebellion and disorder using his skills with the royal bow (granted to him by Ahura Mazda), the *frataraka* in Persis won their autonomy with the same royal weapon, and with the backing of the same supreme deity. Politically and theologically, the Persid *frataraka* depicted themselves as authoritative rulers of the Achaemenid tradition at a time where the imperial Hellenistic establishment was on the eve

[669] The incorporation of the falcon into this archetypally Persian scene was perhaps partly influenced by Zeus' eagle in contemporary Hellenistic coin iconography. The image of Zeus featured on the coinage of Alexander the Great, with the god depicted enthroned, holding a sceptre in one hand, and an eagle in his other outstretched hand (Figure 35) - an image that seems to have been strongly modelled on coin types of Mazaeus, satrap of Cilicia (4th century BC), showing Baal enthroned holding an eagle extended before him; see p. 130, note 429 above. The process of borrowing iconography and adapting it to new cultural needs in the ancient Near East was evidently complex and multi-layered. A further similaritiy between the Greek and Iranian traditions is found in the work of the 6th century BC Greek poet Anacreon, fr. 505d, in which Zeus' golden eagle was said to decorate the god's war standard. In the Iranian tradition, Verethragna is also associated with the battle standard as the *yazata* of Victory; he also transforms into the Varegna bird.

[670] Skjærvø (1997), 102 translates '*frataraka*' as "[one] who is before, ahead of, prior, superior"; see also Wiesehöfer (2000) [2012].

[671] The exact meaning behind the inscription's reference to the divine world remains disputed. Translations include: "*Frataraka* of the Gods", "*Frataraka* of the dead kings of divine descent", and "deputy of gods (on earth)"; see Panaino (2003); Soudavar (2006a), 163-164; Curtis, V.S. (2010), 380, with note 1 and bibliography for a detailed summary.

of its decline.[672] On some coins of the Persid rulers Ardashir I and Wahbarz of the late 3rd/2nd century BC, the legend includes the phrase "son of a Persian", echoing Darius I's own words inscribed on his tomb relief at Naqsh-i Rustam, and emphasising the Persid rulers' link to the former Persian dynasty.[673] This link to the past was celebrated even in miniature: on various limestone blocks from the Harem of Xerxes and the Palace of Darius, thin lined graffiti depicted images of Persid rulers as a testimony of their presence at the site. In the words of Wiesehöfer, the frataraka, as well as the later Sasanian kings, "probably regarded Persepolis and Naqš-e Rostam as the holy places of their forebears."[674]

2. The Royal Archer of the Arsacids in Parthia

The tradition of the Iranian royal archer was also revived on the coinage of Arsaces I following his invasion of the Parthian satrapy in c. 247 BC. However, unlike the coin iconography of the *frataraka* in Persis, the image of the Arsacid seated archer did not follow the model of the Achaemenid kings on their monumental rock reliefs - dressed in Persian garb, holding the bow at ease, and standing under the protection of the divine winged figure. The Arsacid archer was struck onto silver drachms in a seated position, dressed in cavalry costume, and holding a bow in one outstretched hand.[675] On some issues of Arsaces II, a bird is depicted resting at the archer's feet - perhaps the Varegna bird of the Avestan tradition (Figure 4).[676] The beardless face and soft cap of the seated archer have been compared to the founding ruler's portrait on the coin obverse, suggesting that it was Arsaces I himself depicted on the reverse as the royal archer in a mounted warrior's costume.[677] The appearance of the seated archer on Arsaces I's coinage, thus, gives new complexity to the long-standing motif of

[672] Callieri (1998), 36.
[673] Skjærvø (1997), 101-102; Klose (2005), 96; Klose & Müseler (2008), 25; Curtis, V.S. (2010), note 1.
[674] Wiesehöfer (2009) [2009]; see also Allotte de la Füye (1928); Herzfeld (1935), 80-81; *ibid*. (1941), 308; Calmeyer (1976b), 65-66, Abb. 3-4; Razmjou (2005c); Callieri (2006); *ibid*. (2007), 132-134.
[675] S1-5.
[676] S6. The bird on these drachms may have been struck in imitation of the eagle that appears at the feet of a thundering Zeus on coins of Arsacid rivals Diodotus I (c. 255-239 BC) and Diodotus II of Bactria (c. 239-223 BC); Abgarians & Sellwood (1971), 114.
[677] First discussed by Eckhel (1828), 544-546; 549-550; see also Fowler, R. (2005), 148 with bibliography.

the royal archer. It revived the tradition of the former Achaemenid kings who were visualised as the supreme commanders of the bow. Moreover, it reflected the mounted warrior culture of the invading Dahae-Parni, if not the culture of the wider highland nations that spread from Media to Bactria, and who also dressed in the cavalry costume and were trained with the bow.

From where did Arsaces I draw inspiration for the seated archer on his coinage, and what were his motivations for choosing this design? The striking similarities between Arsaces I's design and that of the seated archer on Tarkamuwa's 4th century BC staters has been outlined above: both figures are seated on a stool with turned legs fashioned in the Achaemenid style; both wear the cavalry costume including a long overcoat or *kandys*; and both are equipped with a composite bow (and an arrow, in the case of Tarkamuwa).[678] A small number of Tarkamuwa's staters were unearthed in neighbouring Bactria within the so-called Oxus Treasure hoard, demonstrating that this satrap's coinage was carried beyond Asia Minor – if not during Tarkamuwa's lifetime, then in later centuries following the extensive monetisation of these eastern regions under Alexander and the Seleucids.[679] As noted by V. Curtis, it is possible that Tarkamuwa's stater was one of several pre-Hellenistic specimens that lingered in the treasury of the Parthian satrapy following its capture by Arsaces I.[680] Tarkamuwa's portrayal of the seated archer dressed as a mounted warrior on his coin type may have resonated with Arsaces I's own ideas about his military invasion of the Parthian satrapy, and hence provided an appropriate model for the new ruler's drachms.[681]

The image of the seated archer that was struck onto Arsaces I's drachms was to become the most enduring motif in Arsacid monetary iconography – from the figure's first naturalistic iterations under Arsaces I to his most schematic renderings by the end of the Parthian period. However, while this

[678] See p. 129.
[679] IGCH 1822. On the monetisation of the East, see Schlumberger (1954), 26-30; Bellinger (1962), 56.
[680] Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 9.
[681] The composition of the seated archer dressed in Scythian costume was a standardised motif, as seen, for example, on the pendant and gems of a Graeco-Persian style described on p. 132 above.

seated archer initially shared the same facial characteristics as the ruler himself (clean shaven and wearing a diademed soft cap), these similarities soon diverged during the reign of Mithradates I, the first 'Great King' of Parthia.[682] On his S11 coin series, Mithradates I was instead depicted with a long beard, and the soft cap was removed from the portrait, leaving only the diadem tied around the king's brow (Figure 8). While earlier Arsacid coin portraits were truncated at the neck, Mithradates I now appeared wearing a Greek-style cuirass. Subsequently, the king's successors produced coin portraits showing distinctive features that presumably reflected their true appearance, as well as their costume preferences. These include varying beard lengths, the arrangement of hair in waves or curls, different nose and brow shapes, developments in costume and its ornamentation, as well as particular styles of jewellery.[683] The contrast between the unique portraits of the Arsacids and the seated archer's unchanging features indicates that the latter (at least from the time of Mithradates I) was considered to be a distinct figure from the ruling king. Accordingly, it has been proposed in some scholarship that under these later successors, the seated archer remained as a representation of Arsaces I, immortalised on coined silver as the patriarch and founder of the ruling dynasty.[684]

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[682] Furthermore, the connection between the ruler's portrait and the seated archer may be traced in the development of the soft cap. On the S8-10 drachms, the ruler's portrait shows the soft cap in a more peaked, upright position, perhaps resonating with the Achaemenid tradition that the king alone wore his headdress in this way; see pp. 159-160 above. The seated archer's soft cap also appears to take on a more upright form at the same time. This apparent iconographic development (although this may simply be attributed to the engraver's artistic variation of the motif) appeared almost simultaneously with the royal title 'King' on the S8 issues (Figures 5-7). These coins in question have been attributed to Mithradates I by Sellwood (1980), or to Phriapatius, Phraates I and Mithradates I by Assar (2005), 37-45.

[683] In particular, unique headdresses, costume and jewellery served to distinguish the Arsacid kings from one another on their coinage: for example, Mithradates II's tiara with star and crescent moon decoration (S28) from the early 1st century BC; soon after, the tiara with stag protomes and horn decoration of Sinatruces (S33); the segmented necklet worn by Phraates IV (S50-54) on drachms from the second half of the 1st century BC; and the crested tiara with star decoration adopted by Artabanus IV (S89-90) at the end of the Parthian period.

[684] See Lerner (2017) with bibliography on Longpérier (1853), 29-30; Gardner (1877), 18; Gutschmid (1888), 32; Newell (1938a), 476; Simonetta (1950), 23; Le Rider (1965), 312. Alternative interpretations that identify the Parthian archer as a completely different character have also been offered: one of these equates the figure with the son of Targitaos-Herakles shown receiving the bow from his father, a legendary archer who was thought to be an ancestor of the Scythians; Harmatta (1951), 128; László (1951), 100; Raevskii (1970), 90-95; *ibid*. (1977), 30-36. Lerner (2017), 3-4 has recently addressed this theory and found it unconvinving.

There is significant evidence to demonstrate the prominent role that Arsaces I played throughout the rest of the Parthian period. After his death, subsequent rulers adopted the dynastic name *APΣAKOY* '[of] Arsaces' on their coinage to display their royal bloodline from the apical ancestor. This practice was almost ubiquitous across various records of officialdom in the Parthian sphere.[685] It was, moreover, more in tune with the Achaemenid custom of reciting the dynastic name in their inscribed accounts of their extended lineage, rather than Seleucid custom, which focused on the king's throne name.[686] The 4th century Roman soldier and historian Ammianus Marcellinus compared the "beloved" dynastic name of 'Arsaces' to that of 'Augustus', which held a similar function for the emperors of Rome. He continues: "On account of this, [the Parthians] worship and venerate [Arsaces I] in place of a divine power, and they have propagated his honour up to now so that even in the memory of our time, only a man (if he exists) born from Arsaces is preferred for the throne over other [contenders]. Even during civil disputes (which continually arise amongst them), each person avoids striking an Arsacid with his hand as if it were sacrilege, whether he [the Arsacid] is bearing arms or [acting as] a private citizen."[687]

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[685] In the early Parthian period, exceptions where the Arsacid throne name was used can be found on a very small number of coin types, Babylonian cuneiform tablets, ostraca records from Nisa, and perhaps a monumental inscription from Bisotun that is attributed to Mithradates II; see the S41.1 tetradrachm of Mithradates IV with the inscription '[of] King Arsaces who is called Mithradates, Philhellene'); Shayegan (2011), 191, table 6 and appendix listing the cuneiform tablets that cite the names of rival Arsacid kings *Gutarza* 'Gotarzes' and *Uruda* 'Orodes'; Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), nos. 2638 & 2640, where Phriapatius is uniquely named in the royal genealogy as *Friyapăt*ak: "[…] King Aršak, grandson of *Friyapăt*ak, the son of the nephew of Aršak [I]"; Vanden Berghe (1983), 119 for Grelot's 1673 drawing of the Bisotun monument that mentions Mithradates II by name, and recent discussion in Fowler, R. (2005), 139.

[686] For example, the inscription of Artaxerxes III at Persepolis (A^3Pa, §2), translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 156: "I am the son (of) Artaxerxes [II] the King, (of) Artaxerxes [II] (who was) the son (of) Darius [II] the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son (of) Artaxerxes [I] the King, (of) Artaxerxes [I] (who was) the son (of) Xerxes [I] the King, (of) Xerxes [I] (who was) the son (of) Darius [I] the King, (of) Darius (who was) the son (of) Hystaspes by name, of Hystaspes (who was) the son (of) Arsames by name, an Achaemenian." Contrastingly in the Seleucid tradition, the name of the dynastic house is not invoked in royal inscriptions – only the kings' throne names are used.

[687] Ammianus, 23.6.5-6. See Nabel's (2017) discussion on how various Parthian royals took advantage of the inherent power in the dynastic name, and feared its use against them. For example, some Arsacid kings, perhaps most famously Phraates IV, carried out mass executions of their brothers and sons in order to purge their court of any potential rivals. Other Arsacid rivals were sent as political hostages to Rome, and were later accused of losing their Arsacid identity and hence their legitimacy as a potential ruler, e.g. in Tacitus *Annals*, 6.43 the young Tiridates (a political

On the surface, Ammianus' claim that Arsaces I was worshipped in place of other divine powers is perhaps overzealous in its interpretation of Parthian kingship ideology and religion, since many names from the Parthian period attest to the appropriate veneration of Mazdaean divine beings and creations. These names, such as *Ahurmazddāt* 'Given by Ahura Mazda', *Mihrdāt* 'Given by Mithra' and *Warhragnbōžan* 'Verethragna the Saviour', are scattered prominently throughout the Nisa ostraca. Furthermore, a handful of references to temples dedicated to the divinities Nana and Tir are also present in the ostraca evidence.[688]

Nevertheless, there is evidence to suggest that Arsaces I was considered to be a *deified* ancestor of the Arsacid dynasty. An earlier account by Isidore of Charax from the 1st century BC reports that an everlasting flame was kept burning in the city of Assak in honour of Arsaces I.[689] A small number of Nisa ostraca allude to this practice taking place on behalf of other Arsacid kings, whose own royal fires were kept alight after their lifetimes. Several estates known by the name of various early Arsacid kings were established, possibly in order to finance the maintenance of the royal cult fires.[690] In this way, the glory of deceased kings was represented by the ever-burning sacred flames. In the citadel fortress of Old Nisa, the excavation of a large room known as the Round Hall has been interpreted by Invernizzi as a type of "*heroon*" dedicated to the worship of the Arsacids' ancestors.[691] The remains of a group of five or six clay statues were excavated from this Round Hall in the 1990s, revealing part of a long-bearded bust modelled in the naturalistic style of Hellenistic art and thought to be the portrait of Mithradates I in his latter years, as well as fragments of drapery resembling a Greek tunic. Invernizzi has described this ceremonial space in terms of a royal cult: "not the tomb, which archaeological

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hostage at Rome now returned to the Arsacid throne) is accused of having lost his Arsacid status because of the foreign influence on his upbringing.

[688] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), 184, 197, 205; see pp. 26, 68 above.

[689] Isidore of Charax, §11.

[690] Boyce (1986) [2016]; see pp. 123, 164 above. In the propagandistic rhetoric of the *Letter of Tansar*, these "iconoclastic" fires were reportedly put out by the Sasanian Ardashir I (AD 224-242) and consolidated into a singular royal fire; see translation in Boyce (1968), 47.

[691] Invernizzi (2001), 141-147; *ibid*. (2011a), 196-200, fig. 8; *ibid*. (2011b), 655-657.

research has not yet located, but a memorial, a mausoleum in which cult rituals were periodically performed in honor of the great sovereign, of the dynasty and of Arsakid royalty."[692]

Evidence of a ruler cult can be found also in early Arsacid numismatic material. On some early issues dating to c. first half of the 2nd century BC, the titles *ΘΕΟΥ* '[of the] Divine' and *ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of the] Divine Father' were included within the legend for the first time on Arsacid coinage.[693] While Sellwood attributes these coins to the reign of Mithradates I (c. 171-138 BC), Assar has argued that the former was adopted by Phriapatius (c. 185-170 BC) and the latter by his son Mithradates I (c. 165-132 BC).[694] Mithradates I's son, Phraates II, also struck coinage including the title *ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of the] Divine Father', implying that his father had reached a deified state.[695] This must have occured after the king's passing, since Mithradates I did not adopt the title 'Divine' on any of his own coin issues, following Assar's attributions. Comparative evidence of a ruler cult can be found on the contemporary Graeco-Bactrian coin issues of Antimachus I Theos (c. 185-170 BC).[696] Both the Graeco-Bactrian and Arsacid experimentations with the concept of a ruler cult, however, seem to have been developed in reaction to the Seleucid sphere and its intensifying ideology concerning divine kings.[697] This was instigated by the deification of the Seleucid dynastic founder. The apotheosis of Seleucus I (305-281 BC) was established by his son and heir Antiochus I (281-261 BC).[698] Shortly after his death, Antiochus I dedicated a temple to the divine Seleucus I in Seleucia Pieria, and cemented the myth of his descent from the god Apollo. Under Antiochus I, the motif of the divine ancestor, Apollo Toxotes or 'the

[692] Invernizzi (2011b), 657.
[693] S10.25, S10.17.
[694] Sellwood (1980); Assar (2005), 38, 45. N.B. The respective regnal dates stated for Phriapatius and Mithradates I above are according to each author.
[695] S16.
[696] Bopearachchi (1991), 59-61, 183-187 (series 1-4, 9), pls, 9-10. The Greek-style cuirass of Antimachus I was also adopted on contemporary Arsacid coinage, and further demonstrates the overlapping influences between the Parthian and Graeco-Bactrian kingdoms; see p. 143 above.
[697] See OCD, 1337-1338 on the Hellenistic/Seleucid ruler cult, and discussions in Bickerman (1938), 236-257; Callataÿ & Lorber (2011); Hoover (2011); Iossif (2011); Canepa (2014). Sherwin-White & Kuhrt (1993), 202-203 and Capdetrey (2007), 322-327 argue that a state ruler cult was instituted only in the reign of Antiochus III.
[698] Houghton & Lorber (2002), 114; Erikson (2009), 74; Hoover (2011), 197-187.

Archer', was introduced on coinage, and this motif was struck widely by this king and his successors, notably in the eastern mints of the Seleucid Empire.[699] Antuichus I's son, Antiochus II (261-246 BC) was himself acknowledged as a divine ruler when he was given the title 'Theos' by the Milesians on the western coast of Asia Minor, as noted in the account of Appian (though this title did not appear on the king's coinage).[700] Epigraphic evidence from several decades later demonstrates how the ruler cult had developed in the early 2nd century BC. Three copies of the same inscription dating to 193 BC indicate that state cults with high priests had been established for the king and his royal ancestors under Antiochus III (222-187 BC), and their worship was propagated across the provinces of the empire through the dispersment of royal edicts.[701] Two of these three inscriptions were found in the ancient province of Media. Finally under Antiochus IV (174-164 BC), the divine title 'Theos' ('Divine') or 'Theos Epiphanes' ('God Manifest') was employed on coinage and in inscriptions dated to his reign.[702] While the later title, appearing on coins as *ΘΕΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ* '[of the] God Manifest' was used across the majority of this king's mints, the shorter variant *ΘΕΟΥ* '[of] the Divine' appeared only on coinage from the mint of Ecbatana.[703]

The appearance of extraordinary divine titles on Arsacid coinage is evidence of the intense ideological rivalry that was shared with the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian dynasties. The Arsacid kings sought to similarly elevate their stature by highlighting their lineage from deified ancestors. When Ammianus stated that the Parthians "worship and venerate [Arsaces I] in place of a divine power", he chose the Latin term *numen* to describe the divine nature of the Arsacid dynastic founder. This term is not a direct synonym for *deus* 'God', but rather refers to the "expressed will of a divinity", which is "different both from his or her person and *genius*… In general, the *numen* concerns the gods and,

[699] See pp. 175-177 above.
[700] Appian *Syriaca*, 65.
[701] The three copies of Antiochus III's edict have been found in a) Laodicea-Nehavand in Media; b) Kermanshah in Media; c) Eriza in Phrygia, Asia Minor. See Robert (1949); *ibid*. (1967), 283-296; Sherwin-White & Kuhrt (1993), 202-210; Huyse (1998) [2011]; Capdetrey (2007), 322-327.
[702] OGIS 253 in Spek (2005), 402, no. 3.
[703] Houghton, Lober & Hoover (2008), 49 and nos. 1539-1542.

under the empire, the ruling emperor… [who is endowed] with a quasi-divine power of action."[704]

The Parthians' veneration of Arsaces I - interpreted by Ammianus from the Roman perspective of the *numen* – can also be viewed as an expression of the *khvarnah* that was obtained by the dynastic founder, and which was inherited by successive Arsacid kings until the dynasty's demise in AD 224. The title 'Theos', adopted by some Arsacid kings in their coin legends, suggests that living kings (at least in some periods, usually disturbed by political turmoil) were regarded as divine, just as rival kings in the Graeco-Bactrian and Seleucid spheres propagated this same extraordinary claim to their subjects.[705] However, the more common epithet to refer to the divine status of the ruling house was 'Theopator' or '[of a] Divine Father', and this placed a greater emphasis on the deification of royal ancestors. This notion of a deified ancestor was not limited to the divine fathers of ruling kings, but included the dynastic founder Arsaces I, and perhaps legendary ancestors such as Arash (discussed further below). From the time that the appearance of the iconic seated archer on Arsacid coinage deviated significantly from the royal portrait of Mithradates I, it is difficult to untangle who this archer figure was intended to represent - whether it was one individual, perhaps Arsaces I, or whether he symbolised all divine ancestors of the Arsacid House. Other evidence from the time of Mithradates I suggests that new energy was given to the notion of a ruler cult under this king: ostraca evidence from Nisa suggests that the Arsacid Era dating system that celebrated the establishment of the ruling dynasty in 247 BC under Arsaces I was introduced by Mithradates I.[706] Towards the end of Mithradates I's reign, or under the rule of his heir Phraates II, a *heroon* appears to have been built in

[704] In the 1st century AD, this concept developed into the *numen Augusti* 'of Augustus', which represented "the exceptional power of the ruler, and enabling the attribution of divine honours to him in his lifetime"; OCD, 1054.

[705] The concept of a ruler exercising the will of the divine world also has a strong precendent in the monumental inscriptions of the Achaemenid kings from the time of Darius I. For example, his proclamation at Naqsh-i Rustam emphasises the divine will that guided his actions as the holder of the divine *khvarnah*: "And the (physical) skilfulnesses [in horsemanship, bowmanship and spearmanship] which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me and I have had the strength to use them – by the favor of Ahuramazda what has been done by me, I have done with these skillfulnesses which Ahuramazda has bestowed upon me"; DNb, §8i, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 140.

[706] Dabrowa (2009), 47-48.

Nisa to house life-size, clay statues of the Arsacids' celebrated ancestors, including Mithradates I himself.[707] Moreover, royal portraits on bronze coins issues of Phraates II, Artabanus I and Mithradates II from Nisa and Margiana portray the king's bust with a radiate crown, imparting a divine aura to these rulers.[708] References to dynastic fires that were kept alight in the Parthian satrapy throughout the Arsacid period further indicate the divine status of their ancestors.[709] Evidently, the province of Parthia and the city of Nisa held great significance in terms of royal ceremony and celebration, even after further Arsacid capitals had been established in the regions of Media and Mesopotamia.

While the Parthian archer's features resembled those of the dynastic founder Arsaces I and perhaps alluded to older deified ancestors, it is difficult to ignore the mythological and religious resonances behind this motif.[710] A distinct detail in the composition distinguishes this figure from the antecedent coin types of the Seleucid and Achaemenid empires. While the Apollo Toxotes coinage of Seleucids and the royal archer coinage struck by Tarkamuwa display their respective seated figures handling an arrow in one hand with the bow left idle on the side, the Parthian archer is shown without the arrow but clasping the bow in one outstretched hand.[711] This figure is shown as a shooter of arrows, his weapon prominently cutting across the dynastic name '[of] Arsaces' in the legend before him.

In religious texts, the role of the supernatural bowman is given to the legendary archer known as Erekhsha in the *Yasht* 8 (Hymn to the star Sirius). In the *Shahnameh*, he is named as the Kayanid Arash, and is a claimed ancestor of

[707] Invernizzi (2001), 141-147; *ibid*. (2011a), 196-200, fig. 8; *ibid*. (2011b), 655-657.
[708] S16.28 type of Phraates II; S20 or S22 variant type of Artabanus I; S27 variant type of Mithradates II.
[709] See p. 123 above.
[710] This is true only of the drachms and tetradrachms that depicted the original Parthian seated archer who wears the soft cap headdress and *kandys*. On the S39.1 tetradrachms of Phraates III (c. 70-57 BC), it is the enthroned king himself who is depicted as the royal bowman; see Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 62; *ibid.* (2000), 25; *ibid.* (2007), 15; *ibid*. (2012a), 71; Sinisi (2014), 15-17. This development was continued on several tetradrachm issues of later kings.
[711] The exception to this rule is seen on the S26 drachms of Mithradates II, in which the archer is shown holding different variations of a bow with/without an arrow in one/two hand(s). These variations served an administrative function within the mints to demarcate succeeding series of drachms, rather than an ideological or symbolical function; Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

the Arsacid kings. The archer Arash is involved in heroic exploits from Iran's celebrated history; it was an arrow shot from his bow that was used to demarcate the border between Iran and Turan after the conclusion of the war between Manuchehr and Afrasiab over the Aryan *khvarnah*.[712] This heroic episode features in the Avestan hymn, which similarly describes Erekhsha as an exemplary Iranian warrior:

> "We worship the glorious, opulent star Tishtrya, whose flight is fast, swift-flying, who flies as swiftly to the Wouru.kasha sea as the supernatural arrow which the archer Ǝrəxsha [Erekhsha], the best archer of the Aryans, shot from Mount Airyō.xshutha to Mount Xwanwant.
>
> Ahura Mazdā blew upon (?) it; [the Aməsha Spəntas] (Ahura Mazdā (?) and) Mithra of wide pastures fully prepared for it a path. Good tall Ashi and Pārəndi with the swift chariot swept along behind it, all along, until, flying, it reached Mount Xwanwant. It came down onto Mount Xwanwant…"[713]

This hymn couples Erekhsha's earthbound battles against Iran's enemies with Tishtrya's cosmic struggle against the evil Apaosha, who stands before the Vouru-kasha Sea to block the heaven's rainwater from reaching the Iranians on Earth.[714] As Erekhsha's swift arrow flies across the sky to Mount Xwanwant, propelled further by divine powers, the *yazata* Tishtrya darts swiftly across the sky as a white horse, battling the black horse Apaosha, to fight for the rainwaters that bring prosperity to the Iranians. The hymn, furthermore, draws attention to the *khvarnah* that can be found in the Vouru-kasha Sea, and which is nurtured in its celestial waters.[715] Tishtrya, in defeating Apaosha on the shores of the Vouru-kasha, secures this divine splendour for the Iranian kings. Recognised also as the bright star Sirius, Tishtrya allots the *khvarnah* to men along with the opulent stars and Moon – symbols that have been discussed as part of Mithradates II's elaborate royal tiara in Chapter Two.[716] Erekhsha, thus,

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[712] Davis (2007), 529; see also Morgan (1923-1936), 50, fig. 27; Lukonin (1983), 686.
[713] Yt. 8.37-38, translated by Malandra (1983), 147.
[714] Yt. 8.20-34.
[715] Yt. 8.34.
[716] Yt. 8.1. See Panaino (1990), 149 on the epithet '*khvarnah*-endowed' in stanza 2 of the *Tishtrya Yasht*, which is shared also by Ahura Mazda, Mah (Moon), and the star Satavaesa. Writing in the 1st-2nd century AD, Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride*, 47 claims that Oromasdes (Ahura Mazda) established the Star Sirius above the rest of the stars to act as a guardian and watchman.

iterates in heroic form the *yazata's* remit to defend goodness and righteousness in order to secure the powerful *khvarnah* for Iran.

Although Tishtrya conducts his fight against Apaosha in the form of a "beautiful, white horse", the *yazata* also appears as another avatar: "driving among the (celestial) lights, [he] blends (his) form with the form of a regal, clear-eyed, tall, aggressive, powerful fifteen-year-old man, manifesting his youthful strength".[717] Panaino, drawing on the work of Darmesteter, has explored the possibility that "the Aryans had one or more mythical heroes who were eventually astralized" – Tishtrya being one of them.[718] The youthful, beardless archer on the reverse of the Parthian drachms was perhaps not only reminiscent of the hero archer Erekhsha, but also the *yazata* Tishtrya's warrior incarnation. In the *Yasht*, Tishtrya evidently plays a role in the lives of kings and heroes, as he is called upon as "having power over thousands of boons".[719] In his youthful warrior form, the divine being bestows troops of men to his worshippers; in his second form as a golden-horned steer, he gives herds of cattle for prosperity; and in his third and final form as a white stallion, he grants wealth in horses.[720] Moreover, Tishtrya bestows "springs of water stouter than a horse" to flow to beautiful dwellings, settlements and pasture lands; and he guarantees the security and prosperity of the Iranian peoples: "no enemy army directed here toward the Aryan countries, nor famine, nor mange (?), nor … (?), nor a war chariot, nor an upraised banner."[721] The imagery conjured in these verse can be seen within the context of the Arsacids' invasion of Parthia and expansion into new territories (particularly those concerning troops of warriors and wealth in horses), as well as the challenges of the environment in the north-eastern arid climate. Excavators at the early Parthian city of Nisa have noted the importance of the city's water supply, which was reliant on abundantly flowing mountain streams.[722] For these reasons, Tishtrya may have been a popular

[717] Yt. 8.13.
[718] Panaino (1995), 35, 52-56. See also Darmesteter (1882), 92.
[719] Yt. 8.49.
[720] Yt. 8.15, 17, 19.
[721] Yt. 8.42, 56; Stewart (2007), 141. Panaino (1995), 38-45 on parallels between Tishtrya's three incarnations and similarities to three of Verethragna's avatars.
[722] Pilipko (2001), 138-144; Invernizzi (2004), 136; Lippolis (2014), 223-226.

divine being in Parthian religious thought. According to al-Biruni, the memory of the archer hero Arash was celebrated annually at the feast of Tiragan on the day of Tir (the 13th), in the month of Tir. Boyce suggests that this tradition "probably goes back to Parthian times" when the dynastic connection to the hero was fused into oral poetry.[723]

Surviving evidence from the Parthian period attests to the popularity and worship of the Avestan Tishtrya - a syncretistic deity that became fused with the western Iranian Tir during the Achaemenid period.[724] Within the fragmented Nisa ostraca, the personal names such as *Tīr*, *Tīr(i)dāt* 'Given by Tir', and the diminutive *Tīr(i)mihrak* 'Tir-Mithra' are attested, as well 'as a temple dedicated to *Tīrēnak*.[725] Notably, the only other theophoric name used by Parthian kings aside from the popular 'Mithradates' was 'Tiridates': the first, according to Arrian, a brother of the dynastic founder, Arsaces I; followed by Tiridates II (c. 30-26 BC) and Tiridates III (c. AD 35-36).[726] Parallels between the two popular *yazatas* are further apparent in the *Yashts*: both Tishtrya and Mithra are represented as strong, youthful warriors, and both share the epithet "possessing swift arrows".[727] With elements that echo Tishtrya's arrow-like flight across the sky to make the waters come forth from the Vouru-kasha Sea, Mithras of the western sphere is also represented in some images as making water spring forth from a rock after striking it with an arrow.[728] Ideas surrounding the two divine beings and their emblematic relationship to the

[723] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 75-76; see also Sachau (1879), 205; Panaino (1995), 53; Lerner (2017), 13.
[724] Malandra (1983), 142; Panaino (1995), 61-85. The name of the divine being Tir has often been incorrectly associated in folk etymology with the Middle Persian *tīr* "arrow", though this, in fact, derives from Old Iranian **tigra-/i-*; see Panaino (2005) [2005].
[725] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), 205-205 includes a full list of names attested in the Nisa ostraca. See also the name *Tīrin* attested in the first line of Avroman III (AD 53); Hackl et al. (2010), 566-567, III.2.4.
[726] Arrian *Parthica*, F30-31 (frg. 1 Roos, Photius *Bibliotheca*, 58); Isidore of Charax, §1; Justin 42.5; Cassius Dio, 62.21-23, 63.1-7; Tacitus *Annals*, 6.32, 37, 41-44. See in general Schmitt (2016), 215-216, no. 514; Lerner (2017), 13 notes that names containing the name Tir- seem to have been popular in Central Asia, appearing also in epigraphic fragments from Chorasmia and Sogdiana.
[727] Yt. 8.13-14, Yt. 10.102. See also Boyce (1975a) [1996], 76-77, note 367; Panaino (1988); *ibid*. (1995), 53, note 23.
[728] Vermaseren (1963), 85-88, fig. 24. See also Armenian myths about Mithra within a cave of rock; Russell (1988), 271-274.

ruling Arsacid House were perhaps closely intertwined in the image of the iconic seated archer on coinage.[729]

Ostraca evidence from Nisa provides a further glimpse into the Arsacids' myth of descent from the legendary archer figure of Kay Arash, as he is described in the *Shahnameh*, and the royal heroes of the ancient Kayanid line. One ostracon in particular refers to a wine-grower by the name of *Kaw(i)aršak* 'Kay Arsaces', connecting the name of Arsaces to the legendary Kayanid kings of the *Shahnameh* and of the *Avesta*, who struggled against enemies and *daevas* in order to unite the *Aryans* into one nation.[730] According to the sacred *Yashts*, these kings were awarded with the *kawyan khvarnah* ('kingly splendour belonging to the Kayanids'), and with this they exemplified the role of the hero, becoming "brave, all courageous, all solicitous, all filled with wondrous power, all perceptive, all Kawis bold in action".[731] This link to the Kayanid kings placed Arsaces I within a distinguished line of royal ancestry that stretched back into Iran's legendary, heroic past; these heroic ancestors, moreover, held the divine *khvarnah* of Ahura Mazda that the Arsacids had now claimed for themselves. This claim of descent from these legendary royal heroes is perhaps encapsulated in the dynastic name itself - Arsaces, meaning 'Ruling over Heroes'.[732]

The Parthian archer seated on an *omphalos* was brought to the mint at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris under Mithradates II when he was still referred to as a 'Great King' on coinage (Figure 17). Prior to this production, Arsacid coinage struck at the Greek polis had typically shown an enthroned goddess identified as Tyche, holding a winged Nike in one outstretched hand, and a cornucopia

[729] Notably, some rare issues of bronze coinage from the mint of Nisa, as well as a series from the mint of Margiana, show the reigning kings Phraates II, Artabanus I and Mithradates II with a radiate crown in the style that is usually associated with Apollo-Helios, or rather Mithra in the Iranian tradition; see p. 163 above.

[730] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 1612; with discussion on the use of Kawi- in personal names in Schmitt (1999), 122; *ibid*. (2016), 120-121, no. 255. A second personal name that is attested in the ostraca, and that references the Kayanids reads *Kawēnak* (ostraca no. 1337), while a nearby village is listed as *Kaw(i)dātakān* (ostraca nos. 1529-1531).

[731] Yt. 19.9, 71-72, translated in Malandra (1983), 94. The Kayanid kings who rule over the Aryans are further mentioned in Yt. 5.49, Yt. 15.32, Yt. 17.41; while the dynastic connection to Kay Arash appears also in the *Shahnameh*; see Davis (2007), 141, 529.

[732] See p. 138 above.

cradled in her other arm (Figure 14).[733] Curling around her throne's legs, the river deity of the Tigris was shown as a distinctive mark of the city. The two principal cities of central Mesopotamia during this period, Babylon and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris (the former strongly Hellenised after Alexander established his capital here in c. 331 BC, and the latter founded by Seleucus I in c. 305 BC), are known to have maintained their links to the Greek world even after the decline of the Seleucid dynasty in this region.[734] The introduction of Mithradates II's tetradrachms in Seleucia, showing the seated Parthian archer and notably omitting the conciliatory epithet 'Philhellene', may be interpreted as a decisive change in ideology with the Arsacid king imposing a resolutely Parthian iconography (from a numismatic point of view) in his Mesopotamian capital – a city that had been established under Seleucus I and maintained a strong Hellenistic identity.

Nevertheless, there is evidence to show that Mithradates II did endorse Greek culture in Mesopotamia. A clay tablet from Babylon that references the city's gymnasium is dated to the year 110/109 BC, and gives the Parthian king's title as 'Great King Arsaces, Epiphanes, Philhellene'.[735] The tablet continues to list the winners of that year's athletic games. Although the gymnastic institution was Greek, the listed events reflect a more localised selection of events, starting with archery – a typically Parthian pursuit, as well as a common weapon across Mesopotamia and the Iranian highlands.[736] The clay tablet testifies to the merging of certain cultural institutions in this city inhabited by Greeks and

[733] S21 and S23 tetradrachms, minted by Artabanus I and an Unknown king respectively. See also Phraates II's S17 tetradrachms, where the goddess (here identified as Demeter) wears a tall *polos* headdress, and has been mistakenly depicted with a beard (Figure 11); Cribb (2007), 362; Curtis, V.S. (2007b), 420; Sinisi (2008), 235-237, fig. 2. The motif of a seated Tyche was modeled on coin types of the Seleucid Demetrius I in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; Houghton, Lorber & Hoover (2008), 183-185, tetradrachm nos. 1686-1690, pl. 16.

[734] Spek (2005), 395 ff.

[735] SEG VII.39; see Spek (2005), 406-407, no. 8.

[736] Following archery, the second event as listed on the clay gymnasium tablet from Babylon (SEG VII.39) is the javelin throw. These two primary sports are reminiscent of the royal weapons of the Achaemenid Kings; see Darius I's tomb inscription DNb, §8h, (pp. 179-180 above), in which the king claims to be skilled as both a bowman and spearman. Furthermore, Spek (2005), 407 has suggested that the Greek names of the victors that appear on the clay tablet from Babylon may have been translated from native equivalents (e.g. *Apollodorus* 'Gift of Apollo' = *Nabu-iddin* 'Given by Nabu'). This theory would sugest that a complex cultural synthesis existed below the Hellenistic surface of various Seleucian institutions.

native Babylonians, amongst other cultural groups. While it was possible for archery to be appreciated in the Greek gymnasium, it is also conceivable that the Parthian seated archer motif could also be meaningful to the Greek communities in Babylon and Seleucia. On Mithradates II's tetradrachms, the *omphalos* on which the Parthian archer was seated, as well as the bow, echoes the iconography of the Seleucids' divine ancestor, Apollo Toxotes (though the Parthian archer holds a double curved bow, while Apollo is usually shown holding a singular curved one). Mithradates II's seated archer motif was perhaps understood as a Parthian version of the Greek god (e.g. Mithra or Tir/Tishtrya). Moreover, the *omphalos* that had been associated with the Seleucids' divine ancestor Apollo, and that was now assimilated to the Parthian archer figure, perhaps symbolised the Arsacids' right of conquest over the Seleucid Empire. This visual key may have anticipated the Arsacid claim (reported in later western sources) to the empire of Alexander and the Seleucids.[737] This was not the only instance that a dynastic symbol of the Seleucid House had been incorporated into Arsacid iconography. A series of decorative clay metopes were uncovered at the site of Old Nisa on the other side of the Parthian Empire, showing various royal emblems, including the Parthians' composite bow in a case, and the Seleucids' dynastic anchor.[738]

The bulk of Mithradates II's silver coinage was, however, struck in the Iranian highlands, principally in the mints of Ecbatana, Rhagae and Arsacia in Media. The sheer quantity of the silver output here demonstrates the region's importance as the Parthian power base (instead of the former Seleucid capital in Mesopotamia). The Median mints display the most progressive developments in the iconography surrounding the iconic Parthian archer motif, which was to change the imperial model for future generations of Arsacid kings. On Mithradates II's S26 drachms, the archer's *omphalos* was replaced by a high-backed throne fashioned in an Achaemenid style with turned legs; a footstool appeared beneath the archer's feet; and shortly afterwards on the S27 drachms types, the Achaemenid title 'King of Kings' was adopted into the coin legend

[737] Tacitus *Annals*, 6.31; Cassius Dio, 80.3.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.5.5. Seel also Shayegan (2011), 293-295.
[738] Invernizzi (2010); *ibid*. (2011b), 659-660, fig. 22; Lippolis (2014), fig. 3.

(Figures 19-23). In this new iteration of the Parthian seated archer, the memory of the Achaemenid kings was emphatic. The archer himself, however, maintained the youthful and beardless visage of the earliest Arsacid rulers, as well as the diademed soft cap - while Mithradates II wore the diadem band on its own in a more formal court fashion (S23-S27), and later the highly decorative tiara (S28). While the original Arsacid drachm design of the late 3rd century BC depicted the archer figure on a decorative stool as as a kind of victorious commander or local satrap, Mithradates II's enthroned version with his feet resting on a royal footstool projected a narrative of the Achaemenid imperial revival onto this established image of the dynasty's founding ancestor. This new way of expressing Parthian power and identity prompted changes in the way later generations of Arsacid kings visualised themselves as archer kings.

Mithradates II's successors in the 1st century BC transformed the image of the royal archer on their tetradrachm issues from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. While the Parthian seated archer wearing the soft cap headdress, cavalry suit and *kandys* continued to be depicted for some time, a new innovation was introduced under Phraates III (c. 70-57 BC), which showed the ruling Arsacid king enthroned on the reverse design wearing the Parthian royal costume - a V-necked jacket and trouser suit (Figure 25).[739] The composition of Phraates III's tetradrachm reverse type is strongly evocative of the enthroned Zeus Aetophoros ('bearing an eagle') coin types that Alexander the Great had introduced in the east following his Persian conquest in 330 BC (Figure 35). Under the Seleucids, Alexander's coin iconography continued to be struck in the region, and it was even used on the first drachms of Mithradates I from the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in 141-139 BC.[740] Phraates III's tetradrachm type, however, depicted the king himself on the throne in place of the Greek god Zeus; Phraates III holds an eagle out before him in one hand, and a long sceptre in his other hand. The Hellenistic city goddess Tyche stands behind the king's throne, crowning him with a royal diadem band. The legend that surrounds this scene

[739] S39.1; see Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 62; *ibid.* (2000), 25; *ibid.* (2007), 15; *ibid*. (2012a), 71; Sinisi (2014), 15-17.

[740] See Figure 9 for Mithradates I's S13 drachm types from Seleucia depicting Zeus Aetophoros, and Figure 38 for Seleucis I's own issue of this Alexandrine type.

reads, *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΥ ΕΥΕΡΓΕΤΟΥ ΕΠΙΦΑΝΟΥΣ ΦΙΛΕΛΛΗΝΟΣ* '[of the] King of Kings Arsaces, the Divine, Benefactor, Illustrious, Philhellene'. Here we see the rare epithet 'Divine' as part of the king's titles, which visually parallels the king portrayed in a mode that was strongly reminiscent of the divine Zeus. This was a highly charged allusion that blurred the lines between king and god, and is better understood from the troubled historical context of this period.

Phraates III Theos was the son of Sinatruces, as noted in the 2nd century work of Phlegon of Tralles (modern Aydin, western Turkey).[741] He came to power in the midst of the so-called Parthian "Dark Age", in which various king contended for the Arsacid throne; Phraates III and his father Sinatruces may have descended directly from Mithradates I, while rivals kings traced their lineage to Mithradates II.[742] Alongside internal dynastic rivalries, Phraates III was also entangled in events that were unfolding in Pontus and Armenia during the Third Mithradatic War against the Romans.[743] Efforts to claim power and legitimacy during this turmoil gave rise to the extraordinary epithet and iconography employed Phraates III's coinage that portrayed this king as a divine ruler in the presence of other divinities. In this way, the Alexandrian coin motif was replaced with a distinctive Parthian version - much like the Seleucids' ubiquitous Apollo Toxotes motif was replaced by the Parthian seated archer as the Arsacid sphere was enlarged. Phraates III's enthroned depiction of himself was created in the vein of the Hellenistic predecessors, but rather emphasised the supremacy of the deified Arsacid ruler. Details from the Alexandrian coin type take on new meaning in this new Parthian guise, such as the bird held in the king's outstretched hand, which can be interpreted as the Varegna bird of the Iranian tradition, bringing the *khvarnah* to the king as he receives the royal diadem from the goddess – perhaps Nana in this royal context.[744]

[741] Phlegon (Photius *Bibliotheca*, 97). On his coin types, Phraates III shares his father's distinctive tiara that was decorated with stag protomes.
[742] Assar (2006a), 55-62, 87-96.
[743] Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, 87; Cassius Dio, 36.1.1, 36.45.3, 36.51.1-2, 37.5-7, 39.56.2; Memnon (Photius *Bibliotheca*, 224.38.8); Plutarch *Lucullus*, 30; *ibid*. *Pompey*, 33.6, 36.2, 38-39.
[744] Potts (2001); Sinisi (2008), 236-237; de Jong (2008), 22; Shenkar (2014), 2; *ibid*. (2017), 6; Grenet (2015), 131 ff. See p. 68 above on the worship of Nana in the Parthian period. Curtis, V.S. (2007b),

Phraates III's son and murderer, Mithradates IV (c. 57-54 BC), introduced another new coin type on his tetradrachms issued at Seleucia. Like his father, he depicted himself sitting on a throne on the reverse; however, here he is shown as the royal archer with a bow in hand. Behind him, the winged goddess Nike flies, crowning him with a diadem.[745] This innovation perhaps served to cast Mithradates IV as a faithful descendent of Arsaces I, depicted in a similar fashion to the dynastic founder's inaugural drachms. Mithradates IV's reign was cut short by yet another episode of dynastic rivalry, when his brother Orodes II (previously a co-conspirator in their father's assassination) expelled him from the Parthian Empire. Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC) minted five different series of tetradrachm types throughout the two decades of his rule. One series portrayed the original seated Parthian archer in a soft cap, cavalry suit and *kandys*, holding the royal bow in his outstretched hand (S44.1). In the legend of this particular issue, the king is given the epithet *ΚΤΙΣΤΟΥ* '[of the] Founder', perhaps referencing, as Sellwood suggests, "his re-establishment of Arsacid power after years of anarchy at home and dominance abroad by Rome and Armenia."[746] Orodes II was famously known for the defeat inflicting by his army against the Roman Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC.[747] The pairing of the epithet 'Founder' with the image of the original seated Parthian archer connects Orodes II's consolidation of power with that of the deified dynastic founder, Arsaces I. A second tetradrachm series displayed Orodes II himself enthroned, dressed in the Parthian royal costume, and receiving a victorious palm branch from Tyche, who stands before him holding a cornucopia (S47.1-5). A variation of this theme can be seen in a third tetradrachm series, where the king is again shown enthroned, holding a sceptre in one hand by his side, and a winged Nike holding a diadem in his oustretched hand (S48.1-5) This latter series was also in the style of a similar Hellenistic

422-423 suggests in addition that the goddess as seen on Parthian tetradrachms may represent Anahita or Ashi as guardians of the divine *khvarnah* that is allotted to righteous and legitimate kings.

[745] S41.1, known as Mithradates III in Sellwood (1980). These tetradrachm types were overstruck by Orodes II.

[746] Sellwood (1980), 131.

[747] Plutarch *Crassus*, 23-27; Cassius Dio, 40.21-24.

type that portrayed Zeus Nikephoros 'Bringer of Victory' in the same pose.[748] These varied tetradrachm designs during this period of dynastic turmoil demonstrate the various cultural strands being woven together in the ideology of the ruling kings.

Developments in the drachm and tetradrachm designs of the Parthian kings of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC reveal an interesting evolution in the ideology of the ruling class. Mithradates II was first to introduce the iconic Parthian archer motif to the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris as he created a more centralised administration and emphasised aspects of Arsacid kingship in his coinage. On Mithradates II's drachms, the *omphalos* that had been inherited from the Seleucid Apollo Toxotes was replaced with an Achaemenid-inspired throne, imparting a more regal appearance to the archer of the Arsacid dynasty. In this iconographic shift, any lingering connection to the divine ancestor of the Seleucid dynasty was lost in favour of the more Iranian configuration of the motif. The enthroned Parthian seated archer was struck on Seleucian tetradrachms under the "Dark Age" kings until Phraates III inaugurated a new type to parallel the iconic motif: an image of the king himself as an enthroned royal archer in the extended tradition of the ancient Near East. The duality of these images – the contemporary archer king and the original Parthian seated archer (representing the deified Arsaces I, and perhaps earlier legendary ancestors of a distant heroic age), was a reminder of the royal lineage attached to the issuing ruler. Other tetradrachm types of the 1st century BC transposed the image of the ruling Arsacid king into an iconographic composition that strongly echoed Hellenistic coin types. In these Parthian tetradrachm series, the Greek god Zeus was replaced by the Arsacid king, and he was shown receiving symbols of victory and kingship from various goddesses. By this method, the Arsacid dynasty was able to harness the authority of the Alexander-inspired designs that had been struck ubiquitously across the ancient Near East during the Hellenistic period, and inserted an Arsacid angle to them: here, the ruling king was presented an an agent of the divine world, and specifically in the Iranian tradition, the holder of the *khvarnah*. Principally, the act of striking

[748] See, for example, Seleucus I's 'Zeus Nikephoros' tetradrachms; Houghton & Lorber (2002), 8, 52.

coinage served to create a currency that was stamped with the authority of the ruling class; during this period of Parthian history, how that authority was emphasised depended on how each king was challeneged. The developments in the coin iconography outlined in this chapter overlap with the waxing and waning of Arsacid power spheres, affected by internal dynastic rivalries, by the wars of Parthia's Armenian and Pontic neighbours, and by the rise of enemies in the west, namely Rome. The different stages of development in the Parthian seated archer and Arsacid royal archer coin designs highlight each king's claim to be a legitimate descendent of the deified Arsaces I, to be skilled in the art of bowmanship when confronting rebels and enemies, to represent the will of the divine, and to be a recipient of the divine *khvarnah*. Evidently, the nuances behind these motifs were multifold, and continually adapting throughout Parthian history to new political and ideological challenges.

- Chapter Four -

BRONZE COINAGE IN PARTHIAN HISTORY

Parthian Ideology and the Lesser Coin Denominations

Despite their great iconographic diversity, the bronze coin emissions of the Arsacid kings do not often receive ample attention in studies of this period. Under Mithradates II, bronze coin production underwent certain reforms that saw a standardisation in the selection of imagery across the principal mints. At the same time, cities such as Nineveh in northern Mesopotamia and Susa in the south-west of Iran struck series of bronze coinage that deviated from the homogeneous issues of the Iranian highlands. This chapter seeks to examine the iconography that was displayed on these smaller denominations, and to understand how it interplayed with ideas about royal ideology and local culture.

In his study of Parthian coin finds from the site of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, McDowell outlined two monetary bands that ran across the Arsacids' sphere of influence and into neighbouring kingdoms: stretching between Syria, Babylonia, southern Mesopotamia, and into the regions of Susiana, Elymais and Persis, tetradrachms were traded as the principal denomination; from northern Mesopotamia and across the Iranian highlands, the smaller drachm denomination was minted most frequently.[749] Similar spheres of circulation can be mapped out for the bronze coinage according to patterns of coin finds and coin types. Civic bronzes struck at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris have been excavated in the environs of Babylon, Nippur and Uruk in southern Mesopotamia, as well as Susa in the lower Zagros Mountains, indicating the movement of trade and people between these cities.[750] Bronze coins that had originally been struck by the usurper Hyspaosines in Characene, and were later overstruck by

[749] See pp. 42-44 above.
[750] McDowell (1935), 180.

Mithradates II in 122/121 BC, have also been found upriver in Babylon.[751] The diversity of imagery that was employed across these mints (most notably at Susa) marks the strong local identities of each city. It is thought that these cities were granted the right to administrate their own bronze coin production to a certain extent. In the Iranian highlands, up to four bronze denominations were struck at the beginning of Mithradates II's reign, and these depicted a fixed motif on the reverse of each unit. Their sizes and weights, moreover, were clearly distinguishable from one another. By the end of the king's reign the weights and diameters of these denominations had shrunk dramatically, though a set repertoire of iconography remained in use on these emissions. While these bronze issues were largely based on Seleucid prototypes, their regeneration under the Parthian kings evoke aspects of Arsacid ideology that have been highlighted in the previous chapters of this thesis.

I. Bronze Coinage in the Iranian Highlands

While the image of the Parthian archer dressed in a riding suit dominated the silver drachms of the ruling dynasty, the warrior's mount and choice weapon strongly characterised the iconography of the bronze coinage. The first bronze coin issue to be struck under Arsaces I displayed the ruler's portrait on the obverse, and a composite bow in a case on the reverse.[752] This bow type characterised the majority of the earliest Arsacid bronze emissions until the dynasty was subjected to the Seleucid Antiochus III in c. 209 BC (Figure 72). Following the defeat of Antiochus III at Magnesia in 190 BC and the re-emergence of the autocratic Arsacid elite in Parthia, Arsaces II minted a bronze issue displaying the goddess Nike on the reverse, holding a wreath or diadem and a palm branch – symbols of kingship and victory respectively (Figure 74).[753] Alongside this victory Nike emission, the images of a horse

[751] S23.4. More than 33 bronze coins that were overstruck by Mithradates II were found in a hoard from Babylon in the early 20th century (IGCH 1779); see Allotte de la Füye (1919), 74; Newell (1925); McDowell (1935), 180; le Rider (1965), 387.

[752] Some very early bronze specimens that have come to light in recent years have been noted in Assar (2005), 34, showing the Parthian bow in a case on the reverse of dichalkoi that were minted under Arsaces I (S1-4). Arsaces II also minted bronze units showing the bow in a case; S6.2

[753] S7.2.

walking to right with one foreleg raised above the ground and an elephant walking to the right became increasingly frequent motifs on Parthian bronze coinage (Figures 75-76).[754] This iconography was continued under subsequent rulers, with varying bronze denominations displaying either the horse or elephant in full, or simply their heads (Figures 78-79). Though now less frequently struck, bronze types showing the Parthian bow in a case, as well as the victorious Nike type continued to be produced. Until the reign of Mithradates II, these bronze emissions seem to have followed no particular pattern, and the prevalent iconography was struck across a number of denominations.[755]

Under Mithradates II, the administration of the bronze coin types was reformed across the mints of the Iranian highlands. The image of a horse walking to the right now characterised the largest bronze denomination (tetrachalkoi, Figures 81-82), while a horse's head was struck onto the second largest (dichalkoi, Figures 83-84). The bow in a case was struck onto the single bronze unit (chalkoi, Figure 85), while the victorious goddess Nike was depicted on half units (hemi-chalkoi, Figure 86), holding a palm branch and a royal diadem.[756] In Mithradates II's later years following the adoption of the title 'King of Kings' on his S27 coin types, the horse was eventually replaced by the image of a winged horse (often referred to as the Pegasus of the Greek tradition, Figure 93); and the bow, by the image of a club (often interpreted as the club of Herakles, Figures 95-96).

The choice of iconography on the early bronze types of the Arsacid kings can be interpreted as a means of extolling the strength, skill and success of the Parthian cavalry and archers. During the first half of the 2nd century BC, these armed forces had conquered the entire Iranian Plateau, eventually pushing into Mesopotamia to displace the Seleucid kings from their capital in 141 BC. Nevertheless, the horse on Arsacid bronze coinage is depicted unbridled and

[754] S8.2-3.
[755] Mithradates I, in particular, struck a wide range of bronze units in Ecbatana (S12.8-9, 11-12, 14, 16, 20-22, 25), from the octochalkous (= the eight chalkous, the largest bronze denomination ever struck by an Arsacid king) to the singular chalkous denomination. See also Daryaee (2016), 40.
[756] Brindley (1976), 33.

unarmoured, contrasting the known descriptions of Parthia's famed warhorses.[757] Furthermore, some of the horse type bronzes of Mithradates II were shown with a distinct horn emerging between the horse's ears, giving the animal a supernatural appearance. The development of the walking horse motif towards the prancing winged horse type, moreover, suggests that this animal was also considered as part of the mythological sphere. The horse (real and mythological), as well as the Parthian bow, the club, and the goddess Nike will be examined in detail below, particularly with regard to how these images were assimilated and transformed to resonate in an Arsacid-Iranian context. However, before this discussion, it is important to highlight the source of inspiration behind these Arsacid bronze coin types and designs. The iconographic model for these bronze coins were not an Arsacid innovation, but came from established types of the Seleucid kings, and of the Graeco-Bactrian dynasty in the East that emerged around the same time as Arsaces I carried out his Parthian invasion. The development of these particular designs across the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian mints helps to explain their resurgence and appropriation under the Arsacid kings.

1. Hellenistic and Graeco-Bactrian Prototypes

Seleucid Coinage

After Seleucus I had secured an empire stretching from Asia Minor to the Indus, the Macedonian king established a series of mints in the satrapies lying to the east of the Euphrates River; these newly established monetary centres struck gold, silver and bronze coinage showing a variety of motifs. Some of these included a bridled horse's head, a bull's head and an elephant's head, as well as an armed horsemen and elephant-driven chariots (Figures 39-41, 104-105). These coins were struck between 305-281 BC in the new capital Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and in the cities of Susa, Ecbatana, Bactra, Ai Khanoum, and other

[757] For example, Plutarch *Crassus*, 21.6 on the mail-clad horsemen serving under Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC). A Parthian cavalry horse (shown saddled, bridled and equipped with a Parthian bow) was also depicted on gold aureus and silver denarius coin types struck in 40 BC by Quintus Labienus Parthicus, a general of the Roman Republic; see p. 173 above, and Figure 67.

uncertain mints on the eastern frontier (possibly Margiana).[758] Some of these horse and elephant heads were embellished with bull horns.[759] Numismatists have equated the bridled and horned horse coin motif with the "steed who saved [Seleucus I's] life when he fled from Babylon in 315 [BC]."[760] Additionally, the horns perhaps allude to a second episode in the life of Seleucus I as told by Appian in the 2nd century AD: the Seleucid king was said to have bravely wrestled a sacrificial bull to a halt by its horns after the beast had escaped during a religious ceremony initiated by Alexander the Great.[761] The Greek author states that, for this reason, images of Seleucus I were adorned with bull horns.[762] Regardless of these stories, bull horns became strongly associated with this king as a symbol of his divine patronage. Statues of Seleucus I, Appian further claimed, were adorned with the horns; whilst his coin portraits also displayed him wearing a helmet decorated with this symbolic attribute (Figure 37).[763] Seleucus I's son and heir, Antiochus I, later struck coinage with a

[758] For example, Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 125-129, 145-153, pls. 66-67 from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; nos. 163, 177-182, pls. 9-10 from Susa; no. 203, 209, 213, pls. 11-12 from Ecbatana; nos. 256, 259-270, 272-275, pls. 15, 68 from Bactra, Ai Khanoum & Margiana(?). Alexandrine coin types struck at Ecbatana under Seleucus I also made use of a mint mark showing a the forepart of a horse grazing or a horse's head with horns (Figure 38); *ibid*., nos. 200.1-2, 200.5-7, 201, 202.1-7, 202.9-11, 202.13 ff., pl. 11.

[759] Houghton & Lorber (2002), 7-8 discuss the horned horse and elephant motifs that appear on coinage minted in cities such as an unknown mint in Bactria, Ecbatana, Susa, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Babylon, Carrhae, Antioch, Apamea, Pergamum, and an unknown mint in western Asia Minor.

[760] Houghton & Lorber (2002), 114; see also Hoover (2011). However, Miller & Walters (2004), 51 are unconvinced by this theory. Additionally, some scholars have attempted to associate the bull-horned horse motif with Alexander's famous steed Bucephalus, whose name means 'ox head' and, according to some ancient authors, derived from a branding mark on his haunch. It has been argued that such a comparison would have served to affiliate Seleucus I with Alexander's charger in the conquest of the East; see von Schwarz (1906), 99-100; Jenkins (1990), 133; Mørkholm (1991), 73. This connection between Seleucus I and Alexander, however, has been convincingly disputed in Hoover (2002), 58-59, who in particular points out that the horse was not the only animal to be shown with bull horns on coinage of this period (i.e. the horned elephant types); see also Miller & Walters (2004); Erikson (2012), 123 ff.

[761] Appian *Syriaca*, 57.

[762] *Ibid*. Whilst most translations of Appian's work state that statues of Seleucus I were adorned with these horns (*προστιθέασιν ἐς τοὺς ἀνδριάντας ἐπὶ τῷδε κέρατα*), Miller & Walters (2004), 51, note 31 argue that the term *andrias* rather refers to any type of image, rather than solely statues.

[763] Appian, as above; Houghton & Lorber (2002), 6-7 argue that the horn symbolism (particularly on his horned, panther-skin helmet) connected Seleucus I to the god Dionysus as the conqueror of the East, thus alluding to the Seleucid king's eastern campaign. The horned horse and bull shown on bronze and silver coin types was sometimes accompanied by the image of the dynastic anchor on the obverse - another symbol that became associated Seleucus I's divine heritage; Iossif (2011), 238-239; Strootman (2015).

posthumous portrait of his father, the bull horns now shown protruding directly from the king's diademed head (Figure 43).[764]

This horn motif appears to be related to a royal ideology that was propagated by Seleucus I, and which allowed him to present himself as the legitimate ruler to native Mesopotamians, Mazda-worshipping populations and followers of other faiths in his eastern empire.[765] The bull was a deep-rooted symbol in the indigenous ideology and iconography of the ancient Near East, and its horns were regarded as a divine symbol: the animal was displayed in Babylon on the ceremonial Gate of Ishtar, as well as on the reliefs and columns of the Achaemenid palaces at Persepolis and Susa; it was sacrificed at the Babylonian New Year festival to Bel Marduk; and it featured in the religious and mythological traditions of these populations in the form of the Bull of Heaven in the *Gilgamesh* epic, as a Cattle God in the *Theogony of Dunnu*, as the Primordial Ox in the *Avesta*, as well as an incarnation of the Avestan *yazatas*, Verethragna and Tishtrya.[766] Two millennia before Seleucus I had adorned his helmet with the horns of a bull, the horned helmet of Naram-Sin (c. 2254–2218 BC) of the Akkadian Empire served to identify the ruler as a god-king.[767] This horn detail, usually reserved for the gods, was depicted on Naram-Sin's Victory Stele, in which the king is shown with bow and arrow leading his army to the Lullubi enemy. The symbolic bull horns were shown on Seleucus I's coin types that

[764] Houghton & Lorber (2002) no. 469-472, pl. 21.

[765] Miller & Walters (2004), 51. See also Hoover (2011), 217-218, who writes, "The locally significant emblem of the bull served primarily to mark Seleukos as a legitimate ruler on the native model who could defy the Macedonian stereotype that seems to have deeply haunted elements of the native population. He was not to be confused with the likes of Antigonos Monophthalmos and Demetrios Poliorketes, who had burned the temples of Babylonia and sacked the Achaemenid inheritance at Susa. Nor did he give the impression that he would follow the sinister path that Alexander had taken concerning the Zoroastrian religion."

[766] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 138-139, 150, 172-173; Marzahn (2008), 51, fig. 32; Hoover (2011), 204-206, 210-211; Curtis, J. & Razmjou (2005), 51, figs. 41, 44. For the *gav-aēvō.dātā* 'Primordial Ox', see Y.35, 39, Yt. 13.85; see also *Greater Bundahishn*, 1a.12, 6e.1-4. On the yellow-eared, golden-horned bull incarnation of Verethragna, see Yt. 14.7; see also Yt. 8.16 on the similar transformation of Tishtrya into a golden-horned bull. The horned figure that emerges from the winged disc symbol in Assyrian art, usually interpreted as the divine Ashur or Shamash, has been discussed on pp. 184-185 above.

[767] de Morgan (1900), 106, 144 ff., pl. X; Parrot (1960), 174-178, figs. 211-213; Amiet (1976), 29-32. The Victory Stele of Naram-Sin was initially placed in Sippar (modern Tell Abu Habbah, Iraq) for the cult of the sun god Shamash, but was later taken to Susa in the 12th century BC by the Elamite King Shutruk-Nakhunte.

depicted on the reverse horse and elephant motifs – the distinctive war animals with which the Seleucid Empire was conquered and consolidated.[768] These elements present an aura of the Hellenistic king's military triumphs, political power, and divine legitimacy. Similar motifs were continued under Seleucus I's son, Antiochus I, who served as a co-regent in Bactria from 291 BC, and as king (281-161 BC) of the whole Seleucid Empire following his father's death. When Antiochus I inherited the throne, he immediately struck gold and silver coinage in Bactria to commemorate his deified father (depicted on the obverse portrait with bull horns protruding from his brow). On the reverse of these issues, Antiochus I struck the image of a bridled, horned horse prancing to the right.[769]

Other bronze coin types struck by Antiochus I in Bactria show a bust of Herakles on the obverse in the Alexandrine style, with the same reverse design of a horned horse prancing to the right. A third horn shape can sometimes be seen emerging between the horse's ears, and has been interpreted as the animal's forelock bound into a conical shape in the tradition of the Central Asian riders.[770] Other reverse motifs from the Bactrian mint were a bull walking to the right, a vertical club, and a bow in a case alongside a club.[771] While the club and bow were typically Heraklean attributes, the other motifs perhaps allude to more native ideas surrounding the theme of a hero-god, especially considering Antiochus I's maternal Bactrian ancestry.[772] The accompanying motifs on these

[768] Strabo, 15.2.9 mentions a treaty that Seleucus I wagered with the Maurya king Chandragupta, in which the Seleucid king ceded a portion of his Indian territories in exchange for five hundred of the Maurya king's war elephants (c. 303 BC). See also Polybius, 11.34.10-12 on Seleucus I's supply of elephants.

[769] Houghton & Lorber (2002) associate these types to the mint of Ai Khanoum; however, Bopearachchi (1999) argues for Bactra as the principal mint in Bactria.

[770] Newell (1938b), 239; Lerner (1996), 91-92; Tallis (2005), 225-226, figs. 405, 409.

[771] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 440-442, 445-447, pls. 74-75. The image of the divine Herakles was a popular choice in the east of the Seleucid Empire. The standard Alexandrine type that showed the hero-god's bust on the obverse (paired with an enthroned Zeus holding a Nike of eagle on the reverse) was introduced by Seleucus I into the newly established mints of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Susa, Ecbatana and Nisa (Figures 35, 38). In Ecbatana, alternative reverse designs of a bow, quiver and club were also struck during Seleucus I's reign, based on another Alexandrine type (Figures 36, 42); Houghton & Lorber (2002), no. 218, pl. 12. Seleucus I also introduced new coin types featuring Herakles in the mint of Ecbatana: one particular issue shows Herakles' bust on the obverse, with a heroic Dionysiac figure on the reverse shown mounted on a horned horse with bull ears and horns, and a panther skin tied around the figure's neck (Figure 41); see p. 214 above, and Erikson (2009), 71-77, who identifies this heroic figure as Seleucus I himself.

[772] See p. 176 above.

coin types (horse, bull, club and bow) may have resonated with ideas surrounding the Iranian Verethragna, whose primary incarnations include a horse and bull, and who charges between battle lines of men and daemons wielding weapons and dealing victorious blows to the enemy.[773] A contrast has been drawn between the more typical older and bearded bust of Herakles that was struck by Antiochus I on coinage of the western empire showing the god weary after his labours, and this younger version of the same god as seen on coinage from the eastern empire, with youthful facial features.[774] This contrast in Herakles's facial types highlights the differing artistic visualisations of this hero-god, and perhaps varying local traditions that became associated with his character. In his tenth and final incarnation, Verethragna appears also as a "handosme, intelligent, Māzda-created hero", and is worshipped by men for strength, virility and victory.[775]

Herakles was not only considered to be a divine ancestor of the Macedonian royal house, but he also performed an apotropaic function. A 4th/3rd century Greek inscription discovered over an entrance to the Karaftoo caves in Media (modern Kurdistan Province) gives the formulaic protective couplet "Herakles resides within, let no evil enter".[776] A second inscription accompanied by a relief of the god demonstrates a similar invocation: carved in 149/148 BC as Seleucid power in Media was dramatically receding against the Arsacid advance, the Bisotun relief showing Herakles reposing on top of a lion skin with a cup in hand, and with his bow and club resting behind him, was inscribed with a protective dedication for Kleomenes, the Seleucid commander of the Upper Satrapies.[777] Like the Herakles coinage that showed the hero's weapons on the reverse, the Herakles at Bisotun was depicted with a composite bow, usually described as Scythian in style (though common to various Iranian nations, particularly in the Upper Satrapies). The connection between Herakles

[773] Yt. 14.7, 9; Y. 28. Similarly, Antiochus I's introduction of the Greek Apollo Toxotes coin type was discussed in Chapter Three in relation to the religious culture of native populations in the eastern part of the empire, with possible associations between Nabu and Mithra or Tishtrya.
[774] Erikson (2009), 131-132.
[775] Yt. 14.27-29, translated in Malandra (1983), 84-85.
[776] Stein (1940), 324-345, figs. 98-99; von Gall (1978); *ibid*. (2010) [2012].
[777] Hackl et al. (2010), 461-462, III.1.3.F.3.

and the Scythian style of archery is apparent in the Greek mythological tradition, and in the artistic depictions of this hero-god.[778]

After Antiochus I, successive Seleucid kings continued to use motifs related to the horse and elephant on their coinage, particularly in relation to their campaigns in the lost eastern satrapies. Seleucus II (246-225 BC) undertook an unsuccessful anabasis following the revolts of Arsaces I and Diodotus I in the mid-2nd century BC. At the mint of Antioch in Syria, from where the campaign was launched, this king struck bronze issues with reverse types that displayed the mythical Pegasus prancing to the left; or a bridled horse with two stars hovering above, sometimes accompanied by a control mark in the shape of a shield that is decorated with the dynastic anchor below the horse's belly (Figures 106-107).[779] On the Pegasus types, the king's obverse portrait was shown rather unusually (for a Seleucid monarch) bearded, perhaps in reference to his captivity amongst the Parthians.[780] This obverse and reverse imagery, taken as a whole, has led some scholars to the suggestion that it followed the theme of the Seleucid anabasis into the Upper Satrapies.[781] The symbolism behind this image of Pegasus in the Seleucid eastern empire is obscure. Upon discovering a Seleucid-period bronze plate engraved with the same winged horse at the site of the Great Temple of Masjid-e Suleiman (in ancient Elymais, modern Khuzestan Province), Ghirshman concluded that the

[778] Fowler, R.L. (2013), 267-268 refers to Herodorus, fr. 18 (dating to c. 400 BC), in which the author states that Herakles used Scythian weapons; parallel sources, Fowler adds, claim that the hero was taught the art of bowmanship from the Scythian Teutaros. In contrast, Herodotus, 4.9-10 (writing c. 440 BC) reverses these details: in his version of the Greek myth, Herakles is said to have fathered a son Scythes, from whom all Scythian kings descend. Herodotus states that it was Herakles who imparted the skill of archery to the Scythians. In addition, the Greek author Athenaeus, §35 (2nd-3rd centuries AD) tells an anecdote about Themison of Cyprus, a friend of the Seleucid king Antiochus II, who portrayed himself as Herakles by wearing a lion skin, and holding a club and Scythian bow; see Yong (1854), 289-290 for Athenaeus' fragments.

[779] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 710-712,716, pl. 81.

[780] Lerner (1999), 35-36 outlines the evidence for Seleucus II's supposed captivity in Parthia; however, this is not a universally accepted theory. Lorber & Iossif (2009), 112 discuss the appearance of beards on Seleucid royal portraits in relation to the "presumed Seleucid practice of offering vows at the outset of a military campaign and growing a beard as an outward mark of the vows", particularly before campaigns "to recover lost territory, campaigns to suppress usurpers and campaigns to wrest the kingdom from a rival Seleucid."

[781] Erikson (2009), 176-181. See also coin types of Seleucus II in Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 772, 775, 785, pl. 83 for horse and elephant iconography from the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris; no. 813, 817-824, pl. 85 for horse, elephant and bow imagery from the mint of Ecbatana.

mythical beast was associated with the temple of Athena Hippia ('of the horses') – the goddess of war, patron of heroes and warriors, who invented the bridle and bit in order to harness the horse, and who tamed Pegasus for the hero Bellerophon.[782] In Greek mythology, Athena also presided over Herakles as he completed his labours; and a temple dedicated to Herakles has also been excavated near the same site in ancient Elymais.[783] The suggestion is that Pegasus was associated with Athena as the goddess of war and harnesser of horses, and thus played a role in the martial visual imagery of the Hellenistic kings. The swift-soaring horses incorporated into the Seleucid army were certainly considered to be key resources in the campaign to take back the Parthian and Bactrian satrapies.

In later decades, Antiochus III (223-187 BC) launched an eastern campaign with greater success: the Seleucid king regained a footing in the Upper Satrapies between c. 209-190 BC, and re-established control over the kingdoms of Parthia and Bactria. Like his predecessors, Antiochus III struck coinage to reflect his martial activity directed towards taking back these regions that supplied the Seleucid king's army with horsepower speed and elephantine muscle.[784] Written accounts from the Graeco-Roman world state that Antiochus III confiscated many elephants from Graeco-Bactria.[785] He also struck a countermark of a horse head on Arsacid coin issues following a treaty that subjected Arsaces II to Seleucid rule (Figure 46); in this way, Antiochus III showed himself as the master of these regions and their important resources.[786] A bronze coin type showing on the reverse the image of Nike holding a wreath

[782] Ghirshman (1976), 88-89, 99-100, pl. XCVIII.1. Ghirshman recognises the pre-Hellenistic origins of the winged horse in Iranian and Assyrian art. A group of Hellenistic bullae unearthed at Warka depict a winged horse; Hameeuw & van Overmeire (2014), 140 conclude that this motif was closely related to the Mesopotamian artistic tradition since the beasts appeared in the same formulaic stance as winged bulls and griffins on other bullae excavated at the same site. The Elymaean temple of Athena is mentioned in Strabo, 16.1.8 in connection to the Parthian period; he refers to an episode where the Parthian king Mithradates I plundered various Elymaean temples including that of Athena.
[783] Boyce & Grenet (1991), 44-45.
[784] Houghton & Lorber (2002), 361.
[785] Polybius, 11.34.10-12.
[786] S6.2 variant; Sellwood collection nos. 1740-1741. The small horse head protome, as well as the miniture image of a grazing horse, were both used as mint marks of the Seleucid Ecbatana workshop; see Figures 38, 46.

was issued by the Seleucid king at Ecbatana to commemorate these victories in his eastern campaign.[787]

Following Antiochus III's defeat at Magnesia in 190 BC and the subsequent Treaty of Apamea, the Seleucids were forced to hand over all their war elephants to the Romans, and to vow to never adopt them into their phalanxes again.[788] The gandeur of Antiochus III's army at this battle is described by the Roman historian Livy: he claims that elephants towered around the Macedonian phalanx of 16,000 men, wearing caparisons on their foreheads (perhaps shaped into horns?); a group of a 1,000 horsemen selected from Media were present, as well as a further 1,200 mounted archers from the Dahae, as well as many others from other nations.[789] Despite the defeat and political blow to the Seleucid dynasty, coinage issued under Alexander I Balas (150-145 BC) continued to depict the horse and elephant on reverse designs, even though by this time the Seleucid supply of war elephants had been severely depleted, and their hold on the key horse-rearing lands of Parthia and Media had been diminished.[790] The continued use of these motifs demonstrates the immense visual power that they held in the eastern Seleucid tradition with the consolidation of the rival Parthian and Bactrian kingdoms.[791]

Graeco-Bactrian and the "Sogdian Imitation" Coinage

The coinage of the Seleucid kings set a precedent for the choice of iconography in the eastern mints. In neighbouring Sogdiana, imitation drachms and fractional silver coins were struck showing the bust of Antiochus I on the

[787] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 1255-1258, pls. 95-96.
[788] Appian *Syriaca*, 39; Polybius, 21.42.12.
[789] Livy, 37.40. A similar description appears in Appian *Syriaca*, 32, in which the author states that more than 200 elephants were provided to defend the Macedonian phalanx, as well as groups of mounted archers from the Dahae, Mysia, Elymais and Arabia.
[790] Houghton & Lorber (2002), type nos. for Antiochus II's issues at Ecbatana 1246-9 & 1255-71; Alexander I's issue, 1877.
[791] The rival Graeco-Bactrian kingdom also had a supply of war elephants. Demetrius I (c. 200-190 BC), who invaded parts of north-western India, struck coins showing the royal portrait on the obverse wearing an elephant headdress, as well as other coins with an elephant head motif; Bopearachchi (1991), 164-167 (series 1-5), pls. 4-5. Some Indo-Greek kings continued this elephant iconography on their coinage, most notably Apollodotus I (c. 180-160 BC); see Bopearachchi (1991), 188-191 (series 2-5), pls. 11-12

obverse, and a bridled and horned horse head on the reverse (Figure 45).[792] In some scholarship, these coin types are considered to be near contemporary with Antiochus I's issues at the royal mint in Bactria.[793] Lerner has suggested more recently, however, that the Sogdian imitation mint (located at either Samarkand or Bukhara) was more likely established several decades later under Euthydemus I (c. 230-200 BC) at the time of his invasion into the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom in c. 221 BC.[794] The decision to copy Antiochus I's earlier coin iconography from Bactria, Lerner reasons, was an act of propaganda to align Euthydemus I with the former Seleucid king, who was born from the native princess Apama. The ruling Diodotid kings in Graeco-Bactria, in contrast, had rebelled from Seleucid rule in the mid-3rd century BC, and are said to have eventually made an alliance with the dissident Arsacids in neighbouring Parthia.[795] Euthydemus I also struck silver coinage in the Sogdian mint in his own name and with his own portrait on the obverse; the reverse type also shows a bridled and horned horse head. His bronze issues displayed on the obverse the bearded bust of Herakles; and on the reverse, an unbridled horse prancing to the right, and an unbridled horse head facing right (Figure 110).[796] According to Narain, Euthydemus I was here depicting the heavenly horse of the Fergana region (modern eastern Uzbekistan).[797] The supernatural horn that appeared on these horse types seems to have been a popular feature in Bactria and neighbouring regions, becoming cemented into native tradition.[798]

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[792] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 461-466, pl. 21.

[793] Houghton & Lorber (2002), 158-160. Allotte de la Füye (1910), pl. X, nos. 21-25; *ibid*. (1925), 43-44, pl. VI, nos. 21-24b; Newell (1938b), 269, pl. LVI, nos. 10-12. Developments of this theory and new attributions are given by Zabelina (1949); Mitchiner (1973), 20-29; Zeimal (1983a), 241 ff.; *ibid*. (1983b), 75; *ibid*. (1983c), 87-88. Lerner (1996) provides a more in-depth discussion of this subject.

[794] Lerner (1999), 91-94 argues that this mint (usually described as producing imitation Seleucid coinage) must have been established by someone from the Hellenistic world familiar with Seleucid denominations in order to produce fractional issues not previously struck this far east, and familiar with Greek script in order to reproduce and develop the coin legends.

[795] Justin, 41.4.9.

[796] Bopearachchi (1991), 48-49, 160-163 (series 17-20, 22-24), pls. 3-4; Lerner (1999), 86-88.

[797] Narain (1957), 27; see p. 234 below on these legendary horses.

[798] It is remarkable that in Marco Polo's 13th century text, *The Travels*, the Venetian explorer described his encounters with kings in the province of Badakhshan who are said to have descended from Alexander the Macedonian, and a daughter of Darius the Persian; moreover, Marco Polo heard tales of the extinct horses that had descended from Bucephalus, and which were born with a horn on their forehead just like Alexander's steed; see translation by Cliff (2015), 48-49.

The silver imitation coinage struck during the reign of Antiochus I or Euthydemus I in Sogdiana was undoubtedly influenced by the former's early iconography from the Seleucid-Bactrian mint. However, it is interesting to note the influence of Euthydemus I's bronze types on those of the Parthian kings.[799] Bronze coin types attributed to Phriapatius and Mithradates I show on the reverse design an unbridled horse walking right (Figure 75).[800] Furthermore, some of the Parthian horse types of Mithradates II share an important feature with those minted by Euthydemus I and Antiochus I in the eastern mints of Bactria and Sogdiana: a horn or bound forelock emerges from the horse's head.[801] These specimens argue for a reorientation of how we interpret Arsacid expansion and ideology during this early period. While Mithradates I is famous for enlarging his western frontier and capturing the Seleucid capital of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Mesopotamia, there is evidence of a strong interaction and transmission of ideas with the eastern territories neighbouring the Arsacid kingdom. These interactions can be measured by coin find patterns in north-eastern Parthia: silver and bronze coin types of Antiochus I and Euthydemus I that show the horse motif have been found, unsurprisingly, in Bactria (modern Afghanistan) and Sogdiana (in the environs of Samarkand and other sites in Uzbekistan), as well as in excavations at Parthian Nisa (southern Turkmenistan).[802] Other materials that have been excavated at Nisa are also indicative of Parthia's interaction with regions further east, such as a bowl

[799] In Zeimal's (1983c) study of this so-called imitation coinage from Sogdiana, the author concluded that these issues continued to be struck until the 1st century BC, by which time the iconography had degenerated and the silver weight had fallen below standard. Lerner (1996), 92-93 proposes that these issues were struck only until the first half of the 2nd century BC when production was disturbed by "native rebellions, Parthian encroachment and nomadic invasions [in] Transoxiana" – events which can also account for the degeneration of these issues.

[800] S8.2, S11.6. The chronology for these kings remains a debated subject. Sellwood (1980) gives the dates for Phriapatius as c. 191-176 BC, and Mithradates I as c. 171-138 BC; moreover, he attributes the S8 and S11 bronze horse/horse head types solely to Mithradates I. Assar (2005) offers slightly later dates, with Phriapatius as c. 185-170 BC, and Mithradates as c. 165-132 BC; he assigns the S8 bronzes to Phriapatius as the king's inaugural output in c. 185/184 BC, and the S11 bronzes to Mithradates I. The date of Mithradates I's conquest in the west of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom is also uncertain, but is generally thought to have occurred in between c. 165-155 BC; Debevoise (1969), 19 with note 86; Assar (2005), 42; Olbrycht (2010a), 232-237.

[801] On the earlier Arsacid coinage, the horn or bound forelock detail is difficult to determine due to the wear on the issues. Two S8.2 bronze types of Phriapatius, according to Assar (2005), or Mithradates I, according to Sellwood (1980), perhaps display this horn or bound forelock: Khorasani Collection, K. 692; and Spink & Son London, auction 15006 (22 Sep. 2015), lot 19b.

[802] Houghton & Lorber (2002), nos. 461-466 with notes on provenance; Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 17.

made of Lapis Lazuli, as well as ivory work that has been compared to similarly carved ivory objects from Bactria.[803]

Little is known of early Arsacid and Graeco-Bactrian relations, but written sources suggests that these small, rebellious kingdoms both rivalled and relied on one another as they each consolidated their spheres of power. Justin writes that at first Arsaces I feared Theodotus (=Diodotus I), the local king revolting against Seleucid rule in Bactria, but then made an alliance with his son, also called Theodotus (=Diodotus II).[804] Strabo mentions a secondary theory behind Arsaces I's obscure origins that claims he was a Bactrian who fled westwards from the region when Diodotus I took power, subsequently insitigating his own revolt in Parthia.[805] The elephant motif that was struck alongside the horse imagery under these early Arsacid kings is further indicative of contact between Parthia and her eastern neighbour. This alliance eventually broke down during the reign of Mithradates I, who invaded Bactria and took swathes of land from Eucratides I (c. 171-145 BC), according to Justin, before turning his attack towards Media.[806]

2. Parthian Coinage, Mithradates I to Artabanus I

Following Mithradates I's conquest of Media (soon after 148 BC), Seleucid influences continued to play a role in choices of coin iconography and production. In the mint of Ecbatana, large octachalkoi were produced under Mithradates I, alongside tetrachalkoi, dichalkoi and chalkoi – some marked with letters to denote their denomination.[807] The weights of these coins followed the halved Seleucid standard that had been introduced under Alexander I Bala in c. 150 BC.[808] Furthermore, the Parthian king's coins reproduced Seleucid iconography that had been struck in Ecbatana prior to his conquest. The earliest

[803] See p. 119 above.
[804] Justin, 41.4.8-9.
[805] Strabo, 11.9.3.
[806] Justin, 41.6.1-3. Strabo, 11.9.2, 11.11.2 also mentions these events, though does not name Mithradates I as the ruler responsible for these territorial gains.
[807] For example the letters ΔX, with Δ signifying 'four' in Greek numerals, and X as short for *χάλκοῦς* 'Chalkous'.
[808] Brindley (1976), 32.

of these coin types were struck with the legend *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] King Arsaces', and included on the reverse the images of a) the Greek Dioscuri twin warriors and their caps (S12.6, S12.10, S12.15, S12.19); b) the goddess Nike driving a chariot or walking with a diadem/wreath in hand (S12.9, S.12.14); c) an elephant walking to the right (S12.20); and d) an elephant head facing right (S12.22).[809] Later, the grander title *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] Great King Arsaces' was included on the bronze coin series in Ecbatana after Mithradates I's further military success. This title was used alongside additional reverse types showing a more Parthian related iconography, including a) an unbridled horse head (S12.12, Figure 78); b) a Parthian bow case (S12.11, Figure 77); and c) a male bust with a long beard wearing an Iranian "satrapal" soft cap (S12.13, S12.17-18, S12.23-24a, Figure 80).[810] These new types represent the increased success and confidence of the Parthian kingdom, with victories won in the conquest of Bactria and Media (elephant and horse); fought with the famed, heraldic weapon of the Parthians (the bow); and the establishment of a growing administration under the Arsacid kings (the satrapal figure wearing a soft cap).[811]

The striking of horse and elephant motifs on bronze coinage continued under Phraates II throughout a period of turmoil on Parthia's eastern frontier. In particular, the S16.26-27 dichalkoi showing a) an elephant and b) a horse, and the S16.29-30 chalkoi of the same designs should be highlighted. These bronzes contain the legend *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΜΕΓΑΛΟΥ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ ΘΕΟΠΑΤΟΡΟΣ* '[of] Great King Arsaces, Son of a Divine Father', an inscription associated with a series of drachms that were struck in central and eastern locations. The mint names have been either fully or partially spelled out on these drachm issues; for

[809] Other changes to the iconography on this S12 series have been discussed above: on the obverse portrait, Mithradates I left behind the diademed soft cap headdress and depicted himself wearing the more Hellenised style of the diadem band on its own. On the S12 silver drachm series, the *omphalos* was shown as part of the Parthian seated archer motif.

[810] Dioscuri, Nike and elephant bronze types continued to be struck under the longer title, as well as a reverse type of a bee; S12.7-8, S12.16, S12.21-22, S12.24b-15.

[811] The soft cap bust, it has been suggested, may represent the governor known as Bagasis, who was instated in Media by Mithradates I, possibly his brother; see Justin, 41.6.7 on Bacasis (*sic*) in Media; and Moses of Chorene, 1.8a, 2.68 on Valarshak (Bagasis), the brother of Mithradates I, ruling in Armenia. Assar (2005), 42 identifies Justin's Bacasis and Moses' Valarshak with a Bagāyāsh who is mentioned in the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries* as the brother to the Arsacid king.

example, 'Epar[dus]' in Media, 'Tam[brax]' in Hyrcania and 'Nisa' in Parthia (Figure 13). This series of coinage, struck across various temporary mints, are connected to an increased military presence to counter the westward movement of Scythian nomads. The succeeding king Artabanus I also struck dichalkoi during his brief reign of about four years, displaying a horse head on the reverse (S20.7). Like his predecessor, Artabanus I fought against nomadic incursions on the Parthian kingdom's eastern frontier, and drachms struck in 'Rha[gae]' and 'Mar[giana]' demonstrate the continued concentration of coin production in these central and eastern mints in support the military efforts against these invasions (Figure 15). The bronze coinage with horse and elephant motifs follows this theme of military action on the Parthian-Bactrian borderlands.

While these images of the elephant and horse on coinage had stemmed originally from the Seleucid tradition, it is worth asking whether their meaning had changed since the time of the Hellenistic kings. The Seleucid kings continued to strike horse and elephant designs across the shrinking eastern half of their empire, often in reference to their attempts to regain power in Parthia and Bactria (as discussed above). However, following Antiochus III's defeat at Magnesia in 190 BC, the Seleucids no longer posed a significant threat to the expanding Parthian Empire. In the last three decades of the 2nd century BC, Arsacid military forces were instead facing an evolving nomadic threat on their eastern frontier. This conflict ended the reigns of two Arsacid kings, Phraates II and Artabanus I, and was not quelled until Mithradates II's victory in 119 BC, as recorded in the Babylonian *Astronomical Diaries*.[812] Subsequently, Mithradates II turned westwards, consolidating his power and influence over the minor kingdoms of Characene, Elymais and Persis, and seizing land in Media Atropatene. Under this king, a new political narrative began to develop with the arrival of the Chinese Han embassies in the east, the expanding Roman sphere in the west.

[812] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -118A, A18-22.

3. Mithradates II and the Reform of the Bronze Coinage

During the early years of Mithradates II's reign, the bronze coinage underwent a major re-organisation as Arsacid power was consolidated over territories and trade routes; it was, moreover, minted in much larger volumes than under earlier Parthian kings.[813] As outlined above, the iconography on these bronzes was standardised in order to reflect the denomination of the coin.[814] Initially, the standard on which these were struck largely corresponded to the halved Seleucid standard. Where, and in how many mints were these bronzes produced has been a matter of debate over the last four decades.[815] At least two main centres of production can definitively be determined for the beginning of Mithradates II's reign, when the king appears with a shorter beard and more youthful appearance.[816] One mint was characterised by the letters M or MI (S24.35-37, S24.40, S24.45) behind the bust on the obverse, and struck the full range of denominations, from the quadruple unit (tetrachalkous) to a half unit (hemi-chalkous); Figures 81, 83, 85-86.[817] The second mint, using a more complex monogram 𐭌 (S24.34, S.24.39) on the obverse, can also be distinguished by a distinctive feature on the reverse of the quadruple and double (dichalkous) units: a horn (or the concical forelock) is depicted between the ears of the horse walking right and the horse head facing right; Figures 82,

[813] Brindley (1976), 32.
[814] See p. 213.
[815] Brindley (1976), 32-33 has argued that the bronze types display distinct differences in the style of the bust, in the varying monograms and lettering, and in the manufacturing of the flans, suggesting that four separate mints were in operation. The halved Seleucid standard was continued in three of Brindley's four proposed mints. Brindley's fourth mint, on the other hand, appears to have been regulated differently. He states "the sizes and weights standards here are different and so the relations are unclear at this stage." Sellwood (1980) attributes Mithradates II's principal bronze coinage to the mints of Ecbatana, Rhagae, and Nisa. Nikitin's (1983) assessment also takes into account the style of the iconography. He argues that the majority of Mithradates II's bronze coinage matches the artistry of a group of drachms (of the S24.19-23 type) that he attributes to Rhagae. Nikitin further states that fewer bronzes were struck at Ecbatana, using the same stylistic comparison to drachms of this mint, while at least one other unknown mint produced a small number of bronze issues. See most recently Curtis, V.S., *et al*. (forthcoming 2018) on this issue.
[816] S24.33-40; this excludes the Susa chalkoi, which will be examined below. See a revised typology for Mithradates II's bronze coinage in Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[817] S24.35-36, S24.37-38, S24.40, S24.45-46.

84.[818] This detail is reminiscent of the horned horses on the coinage of the Bactrian and Sogdian mints during the reigns of Antiochus I and Euthydemus I.

Later in Mithradates II's reign, when the diademed king appears aged with a longer beard (S27 types), the rigid denomination system of the earlier years had started to degenerate.[819] By the end of the king's reign (S28 types), the dimensions of the original four bronze denominations were almost indistinguishable from one another. A new set of motifs for the bronze coinage were introduced in one of Mithradates II's mints, and eventually became the dominant iconography on the king's final issues; Figures 93-96. These were: a) the image of a winged horse or Pegasus (sometimes horned) on the tetrachalkoi; b) a Nike-style goddess on the dichalkoi; and c) the club of the Herakles on the chalkoi. The half unit was no longer struck.[820] Identifying the minting centres for these later bronze coins continues to be challenging:[821] while some of the bronzes (S28.8) show the king on the obverse wearing a tiara decorated with crescent moons and correlates with drachms of the same obverse type from Ecbatana (S28.1),[822] the tiara decoration on the majority of the S28 bronze coins cannot be easily seen. The latter mostly seem to show three beaded rows of decoration on the king's tiara (S28.9, S28.13, S28.15-19), but the same

[818] S24.34, S24.39. It remains unclear whether this mint struck the smaller chalkous or hemichalkous denominations; no coins of these size survive with the distinctive Φ monogram. The control marks cited in this thesis are part of the 'Numismatica Pro' font, which is copyrighted by E.C.D. Hopkins, and used here with his kind permission.

[819] S26.25-29, S26.33, S27.6-13, S27.28.

[820] S28.8-10, S28.11-12, S28.14-19. Brindley (1976), 33 comments on the degenerating weights of these later bronze types, stating that the hemichalkoi appear to have been dropped, while the remaining denominations dropped in weight to almost half their former value. The available data on the SNP database, sylloge.org, allows a clearer picture to emerge on the degeneration of the S28 bronze denomination classes. The average dimensions of the S28 Pegasus "tetrachalkoi" are 2.6 g. and 16.2 mm., significantly down from the average dimensions of the earliest S24 horse tetrachalkoi, 7.5 g. and 21.1 mm. The same pattern is observed on the other denominations: S28 Nike "dichalkoi", 1.8 g. / 13.7 mm., compared to S24 horse head dichalkoi, 3.7 g. / 18.0 mm.; S28 club "chalkoi", 1.5 g. / 13.1 mm., compared to S24 bow chalkoi, 1.9 g. / 14.2 mm. Moreover, the S24 tetrachalkoi are on average 3.8 g. heavier than the S24 dichalkoi, and the S24 dichalkoi 1.8 g. heavier than the S24 chalkoi. Conversely only 0.8 g. separates the S28 "tetrachalkoi" from the S28 "dichalkoi", and only 0.3 g. separates the S28 "dichalkoi" from the S28 "chalkoi". These differences in weight for the S28 types are barely distinguishable in practical terms.

[821] Brindley (1976), 33 claims that a winged horse tetrachalkous (type S26.27) in his personal collection shows the Greek letters 'N(I)' behind the obverse bust, suggesting that this coin was struck at Nisa in north-eastern Parthia; however, no known examples of this type can be located by the author.

[822] Mint attribution is according to SNP2.

decoration as seen on the drachms has been linked to the three principal mints of Ecbatana, Rhagae and Arsacia. Only one series is distinctly marked by a control mark ( , S28.15-16), though what this monograms represents is unclear. Notably, the mythical winged horse or Pegasus that was depicted mid-gallop with its front hooves raised off the ground shows a similarity in style to the bronze coinage of the Graeco-Bactrian Euthydemus I that show a horse prancing to the right with its front hooves raised in the air (Figure 110). Moreover, like the horse coin types of Antiochus I and Euthydemus I that were minted in Bactria and neighbouring regions, Mithradates II's winged horse was sometimes shown with the distinctive horn between its ears.

How can these developments in the bronze coin production be understood within the context of the changing political landscape during Mithradates II's time? The standardisation of the main bronze coinage early in the king's reign shows that the Arsacid court centralised its control over the production of these types, even though they were primarily used for small transactions rather than filling state treasuries. While the centralised court of Mithradates II determined the iconography on these types, local artistic traditions and styles were also incorporated into the artistry of these bronze denominations (such as the horn that appears on a group of horse and Pegasus types). Similar developments towards the increased centralisation of the silver drachm production from this period are also evident.[823] The numismatic evidence suggests that Mithradates II strove to consolidate his authority over the principal mints of the Iranian Plateau, where the bulk of the empire's wealth was concentrated.[824] This effort to streamline and centralise the empire's

[823] The centralised organisation of the bronze coin iconography is also mirrored on silver denominations. At Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, the iconic Parthian seated archer motif replaced the established Hellenistic iconography of this mint, and reflected the same iconographic type that was struck contemporarily in the Iranian highlands. Furthermore, all silver coin types struck across the empire adopted the square arrangement of the legend on the reverse (whereas this had been largely limited to the mint of Ecbatana under previous kings, with other mints generally using a parallel arrangement). Mithradates II maintained Ecbatana as the chief mint – not only did it produce the largest quantity of silver, it also played a role in the administration of other temporary mints during periods of heightened coin production; see Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

[824] Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018). Curiously, after the degeneration of the bronze denominational system at the end of Mithradates II's reign, monograms were still in use on some of

monetary production was probably not coincidental, since it is during this period that new trading and diplomatic networks were established with the Chinese to the east from c. 115-104 BC, and with Rome to the west from c. 96 BC – the beginning of what is known today as the lucrative Silk Route. The rise in volume of bronze coinage during the reign of Mithradates II, as well as concerted efforts to standardise these denominations (as well as the silver), suggests that the Arsacid king was keen to capitalise on Parthia's position as an intermediary on overland trade routes. The standardisation of iconography across the principal bronze issues of the highlands provided an opportunity to consolidate ideas about Arsacid identity, and how it was portrayed on the royal coinage.

Early in his reign, Mithradates II subjugated the unruly nomads and re-established Arsacid control over the eastern frontier. A fragmented Babylonian cuneiform tablet dated to October/November of 119 BC states that the Arsacid king sent a message to the governor in Babylon to report his victory over the tribal invaders, who had retreated into the rugged mountains.[825] Meanwhile further east, the Chinese Han dynasty was fighting similar battles against the nomadic Xiongnu people of the Asian steppe. In 138 BC, the Chinese traveller and diplomat Zhang Qian was sent by the Emperor Wu to establish an alliance with the Yuezhi tribe that had been displaced by the Xiongnu to eventually settle on the northern side of the Oxus River (Amu Dayra) in the mid-2nd century BC.[826] His account is preserved in Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian* (*Shiji*), produced under the Han dynasty and dated to the late 2nd or early 1st century BC. The Yuezhi, it was discovered, had also established their sovereignty over the territory of the Daxia (Bactria).[827] Zhang Qian spent over a decade in the so-called western territories (west of the Hexi corridor), partly in captivity amongst the Xiongnu, and partly in exploration of Fergana (eastern Uzbekistan), the territories of the Yuezhi and the Kangju in Sogdiana, and the

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the bronze series as control marks (S28.14-16). On their silver counterparts, monograms and letters had long been abandoned.

[825] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -118A, A18-22. Mithradates II's account perhaps refers to the Pamir Mountains, or the Hindu Kush.

[826] Posch (1998); Wang, T. (2007), 88; *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 264.

[827] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 268.

territory of the Daxia in Bactria. In 125 BC, Zhang Qian returned to the Han court with reports on the regions he had seen and on those further afield that he had heard about, such as the kingdom of Anxi (Parthia) westwards of the Oxus River, and Daxia (Bactria) to the south – both rich in unusual products.[828] His account aroused the interest of the Chinese emperor, especially on the subject of the tall and powerful horses of the Dayuan people who lived in the Fergana Valley.

The Chinese emperor at last scored a victory over the nomadic Xiongnu people in 121 BC, gaining control over the Hexi corridor in northern China that linked the Yellow River to Central Asia. In 119 BC, when Mithradates II was taming the eastern nomadic invasions in Parthia, Zhang Qian was sent on another mission to petition an alliance with the Wusun people of the Ili Valley (on the modern Chinese-Kazakhstan border) against the remaining Xiongnu tribesmen.[829] This new mission to the western regions presented the Han with an opportunity to establish formal trade links with Parthia, and Mithradates II is said to have responded with great enthusiasm. Sometime between 115-104 BC, an escort supplied by the Arsacid king met the Chinese delegation on the Oxus River – Parthia's easternmost frontier. Sima Qian recounts, "When the Han envoys first visited the kingdom of An-hsi [Anxi = Parthia], the king of An-hsi dispatched a party of twenty thousand horsemen to meet them on the eastern border of his kingdom… When the Han envoys set out again to return to China, the king of An-hsi dispatched envoys of his own to accompany them… The emperor was delighted at this."[830] The Chinese account perhaps exaggerates the number of horsemen deployed to this diplomatic mission (as noted by Wang), but it nevertheless demonstrates the role of the horse in travelling and patrolling the empire. With the powerful Yuezhi and Xiongnu nomads subdued and unable to intimidate and displace the populations of Central Asia, a time of relative peace ensued allowing trade to develop between the Parthian and

[828] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 265-269.
[829] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 271-274.
[830] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 278; Tao (2007), 99-100 comments that the Parthian escort of 20,000 horsemen is most likely an exaggeration.

Chinese kingdoms.[831] Sima Qian's account relates that between five and ten caravans of over a hundred members were sent from the Han to Parthia, Bactria, Fergana and other foreign regions each year, amount to between 500 and 1,000 visitors travelling westwards annualy.[832]

Little is said on what was traded in the Chinese source: gold, silk, cattle and sheep were brought by Chinese envoys, who sought to bring back "rare objects" to the Han court.[833] In Bactria, the account says, markets were filled with all kinds of goods, and the waters and banks of the Wei River (Oxus) that marked the Parthian border were well travelled by merchant boats and carts moving between cities.[834] The Parthians and their eastern neighbours are described as "skilful at commerce and will haggle over a fraction of a cent".[835] The earliest Parthian coin finds in north-west Bactria and the Oxus River region are issues of Mithradates II. Similarly, the earliest Parthian coin finds from the South Ural region also date to the reign of this king.[836] Two Parthian bronze coins that were purchased from a debt collector of Bukhara in the early 20th century by Aurel Stein may indicate ancient merchants also carrying these lower value issues across the Oxus (though this should be noted with caution, since the context of the coins' discovery is not fully known).[837] One of these bronzes was a dichalkous of Mithradates II showing the obverse monograms MI

[831] The tomb of King Zhao Mo, who ruled in Nanyue (modern Guangzhou, southern China) until his death in 122 BC, contained a silver box of Persian origin, demonstrating the reach of trade in the last quarter of the 2nd century BC; Nickel (2012), 291-292, no. 167.
[832] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 275.
[833] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 272, 288.
[834] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 268-269.
[835] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 280.
[836] Pilipko (1976); Koshelenko & Sarianidi (1992); Rtveladze (1994), 87; *ibid*. (1995), 187; *ibid*. (2000); Olbrycht (2001), 109; *ibid*. (2010b), 151-152. The earliest Parthian coin specimens included in the Tillya Tepe burials in northern Afghanistan were of Mithradates II of the S27.3 type, where the king is shown wearing a diadem band on the obverse, while the reverse shows the Parthian archer enthroned and the legend that begins with the title '[of the] Great King of Kings…'; other coins of Mithradates II have been found in Mazar-e Sharif (northern Afghanistan) and Termez (southern Uzbekistan). In addition, the earliest Parthian coin specimens in the numismatic collection of the National Bank of Uzbekistan date to the reign of Mithradates II; however their provenance is unclear to the author. These comprise a drachm showing the diademed king of the S24.10 type (from Ecbatana), and drachms with the king wearing the tall tiara of the S28.3 and S28.4 types; Azimov & Rtveladze (1997-2001), vol. 1, no. 15; vol. 3, no. 8; and vol. 4, no. 9.
[837] Wang, H. (2004), 33, 153, 248; Aurel Stein (1912), 141. Aurel Stein was passing through Karghalik (Xinjiang province, western China), an oasis town located along the ancient trade routes between Central Asia, China and India, when he purchased these bronzes.

and 𐭐 and a horse's head on the reverse (S27.10), and the second a tetrachalkous of the later king Phraates III (c. 70-57 BC) showing a prancing horse type (S39.19). On the latter coin, Phraates III wears the Parthian tiara decorated with stag protomes – a feature similar to the tiara of his father Sinatruces, and which has been linked to the animal style of Scythian art. Along with the written account of Sima Qian, these bronze coin finds (although few in number) hint at the flourishing trade partnerships between Parthia and those kingdoms lying further east from the reign of Mithradates II onwards. Although silver was the main metal of trade, bronze coinage was necessary to carry out smaller transactions.

It must be remembered that this was not a straightforward period of growing trade and unity between the Han and Arsacids against the "nomadic threat".[838] Sima Qian's account hints at underlying tensions between the two major powers. After returning from his exploration mission of the western states in 125 BC, Zhang Qian reported to the Chinese emperor on the number of skilled and battle-ready archers that could be found in Fergana and in its neighbouring regions.[839] The Emperor, it is said, expressed his desire to expand his influence westward, subjugate the peoples of Sogdiana, and eventually conquer the kingdoms of Bactria and Parthia, who were perceived to be militarily weak.[840] There were reports of Chinese envoys antagonising and plundering local populations. Moreover, the Chinese envoys also considered all

[838] Emperor Wu sponsored the building of fortifications in western China to secure the trade routes into Central Asia as part of a wider movement to buttress the Han kingdom against Xiongnu incursions; *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 275. This was part of a larger trend to fortify China's northern reaches - early sections of the Great Wall of China were reinforced and extended under the Han dynasty to protect against invasion from the Asian steppe to the north; see Lovell (2006), 71. Excavations in north-eastern Iran in the 1970s revealed a similar building project had been undertaken in the Iranian world: a defensive wall was constructed across c. 180 kilometers of ancient Hyrcania, spanning from the south-eastern shore of the Caspian Sea to the Pishkamar Mountains in Iran's north-east; Kiani (1982), 14. Known as the Defensive Wall of Gorgan, this fortification separated the fertile, agricultural and settled communities to the south from the steppe, pastoral lands to the north. More than thirty fortresses secured the wall and allowed stationed garrisons to stand guard. Kiani (1982), 11-38 originally attributed the wall to the reign of Mithradates II. However, recent re-examination of the Defensive Wall of Gorgan has confirmed a latter date for its completion closer to the $5^{th}/6^{th}$ century AD; Nokandeh *et al* (2006), 161-163. Parthian potsherds found in manmade mounds within the vicinity of a cluster of fortresses 11-13 may suggest several earlier phases of occupation; Nokandeh *et al* (2006), 163.

[839] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 266-267.

[840] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 269-270.

the people living from Fergana to Parthia to be arrogant, disrespectful of their rituals and of the wishes of the Han Emperor.[841] The reason behind this arrogance, Sima Qian states, was that these western regions feared the nearby Xiongnu more than the remote Han, and so accommodated the nomadic peoples above the Chinese envoys. Arsacid alliances with nomadic groups of Central Asia are known to have existed, for example, when Sinatruces fled to the Sacaraucae after what is thought to have been a failed coup d'état in the wake of Mithradates II's death.[842]

Increasing tensions with the western territories ultimately led to the War of the Heavenly Horses (104-100 BC) between the Han and the Dayuan over the prized, blood-sweating mounts of Fergana. According to Sima Qian's account, these horses were the most coveted commodity by the Han, as their hardy nature could carry riders further and faster.[843] This was an acute concern for the Han dynasty, whose large kingdom could be secured more effectively with faster horses and cavalry units. This was felt especially, Creel argues, in battles fought in the rugged terrain of the Xiongnu nomads: "The Chinese are said to have lost… more than 100,000 military horses… One can only speculate on the reasons for such a toll; probably the fact that the Chinese horses were not accustomed to the Hsiung-nu [Xiongnu] territory, or adequate to the exertions it demanded, had much to do with it. The result was that the Chinese, for lack of horses, were unable to attack the Hsiung-nu effectively for some time."[844] After the Chinese won this war and seized more than three thousand stallions and mares, they continued to send envoys westwards to Parthia in order to source rare objects, and to "call attention in a tactful way to the might which the Han had displayed in its conquest of Ta-yüan [Dayuan, Fergana]".[845] The early Arsacid kings also alluded to the military might that they had displayed against the Graeco-Bactrian and Seleucid kings on bronze coin types displaying horse, elephant, bow and Nike motifs. Some of these motifs were continued under Mithradates II in a more coherent arrangement across the

[841] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 276-277 & 279.
[842] See pp. 96, 161 above.
[843] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 266.
[844] Creel (1965), 660.
[845] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 288.

denominations, alongside the newer motifs of a winged horse or Pegasus and a club. However, as the literary accounts from the Chinese sphere demonstrate, the horse was valued in many ways beyond military might, and played a large role in diplomatic processions, as well as trade.

4. Bronze Coin Iconography in Parthian Culture, Mythology and Religion

The iconography on Parthian bronzes from the time of Mithradates II were largely inspired by Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian prototypes, which were developed under the early Arsacid kings during both their successful and thwarted campaigns to expand the kingdom. Although this iconography had its roots in Hellenistic art, the preferred motifs of Mithradates II's issues encapsulated a very native image of Parthia power and culture.

Horses, Real and Mythological

At the beginning of Mithradates II reign, the two highest bronze denominations were characterised by the image of the horse walking to the right, and the horse head facing right. According to the historian Justin, the horse was symbolic of the Parthian elite and free citizens, who went to war, feasts, meetings and duties on horseback, as well as travelled, idled, traded and chatted with each other from their mount.[846] From a young age, Parthian males were taught the art of riding and archery.[847] The horse's value served as a means of social differentiation to demark the nobility and the wealthy above the subject populations, who got by on foot.[848] This social rule was apparently different during times of war, according to the western sources. Horses carried the throngs of dependent and slave mounted archers into battle to fight against Parthia's enemies, making a famously fast and fierce army:

> "*… [the Parthians] arranged their cataphracts in front of the Romans and with their other horses in disarray rode round them, and tearing up the plain and raising from the depths heaps of sand, they drew up*

[846] Justin, 41.3.4.
[847] Justin 41.2.5; Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.2.20.
[848] Justin, 41.3.4.

> *immense clouds of dust so that the Romans could neither see clearly nor cry out, but were corralled in upon one another in a small space, were shot and died neither an easy nor a quick death."*[849]

These horses were admired for their speed and stature by foreign observers, such as the Greek geographer Strabo.[850] Roman sources claim that these riders were instructed how to shoot with a bow from the saddle by their masters, and were provided to the Arsacid king as needed.[851] This observation suggests that elite members of Parthian society maintained herds of horses, and specially bred them to produce the fastest and hardiest chargers.[852] This premise was captured in Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, in which it is stated "Zal had all the herds of horses in Zavolestan, as well as some from Kabol, driven before Rostam, and the herdsmen explained to him the royal brands that they bore."[853] In the Avestan *Yasht* dedicated to the Fravashis, the aristocratic name *Vīrāspa*, meaning '[Possessing] Men and Horses', is attested, and perhaps evokes the same idea of providing men and horses to the king.[854]

The centrality of the horse in the royal court is vividly envisioned in the later Iranian epics that have their roots in the Parthian period oral tradition. In these texts, the king and his court ride between palaces, go hunting, fight battles and play polo on the horse. For example, when King Mobad of Gorgani's *Vis and Ramin* prepares to go hunting, "The castle rang with din, with drums and bells, / With bugles, brazen hooves, and ostlers' yells, / And mounted men emerged in companies / Jostling like boughs of blossom on the trees, / Surging from Marv like some great wave that rears / To fearsome heights before it disappears."[855]

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[849] Plutarch *Crassus*, 25.4-5, also 27.1-2; Justin, 41.2.5-6; Cassius Dio, 40.15.2-4; Olbrycht (2003), 77-89.
[850] Strabo, 11.13.7.
[851] Justin, 41.2.5-6; Cassius Dio, 40.15.2-4. The Persepolis Fortification Tablets indicate that a similar relationship existed in the Achaemenid period between aristocratic Persians and their king. The former, who owned large estates, had the means to invest in breeding and rearing of livestock, which were acquired by the royal domain – in the case of these tablets, the animals that were exchanged were goats, sheep, cattle, asses and mules; Henkelman (2005), 149, 151.
[852] Chinese sources indicate the same culture of horse rearing amongst the Wusun of the Ili Valley (modern Chinese-Kazakhstan border). The wealthy steppe tribesmen are said to have owned several thousands of horses each; see *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 278.
[853] Translation in Davis (2007), 132.
[854] Yt. 13.108.
[855] Translation in Davis (2008), 460.

In the biblical *Book of Esther* (thought to have been redacted in the 2nd century BC during the Parthian era), the Persian king gives honours to Mordecai by permitting him to be dressed in a royal garment and to ride in public on one of the king's horses decorated with royal caparisons.[856]

The Parthian king and his entourage of horses also left a great impression on the Graeco-Roman imagination. In the account of Cassius Dios from the 2nd century AD, the author describes the journey taken by the Armenian prince Tiridates I (brother of the Parthian king, Vologases I) to Rome in AD 66. The Arsacid prince rode on horseback, accompanied by his wife, children, and an ostentatious 3,000 Parthian horsemen.[857] This anecdote is evocative of a similar display that was recounted in the Chinese history of Sima Qian (compiled in the early 1st century BC), and in which the author boasts that a delegation of some 20,000 horsemen was sent by Mithradates II to meet the Han's diplomatic caravan at the Parthian border.[858] The magnificent horses of the Parthian kings not only augmented their royal image, but also played a key role in diplomatic relations, such as the above encounters with the Chinese embassy visiting Parthia and the Parthian king's visit to Rome, as well as diplomatic rivalries. Following the defeat of Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, Cassius Dio claims that a horse was sent as a distinguished gift to the Roman general. However, the Parthian general Surena used this gift as a ploy to lure his defeated enemy into a fatal trap.[859]

As a highly prized commodity in social, military and royal circles, it is inevitable that the horse came to play a powerful, emblematic role in the Arsacid dynasty's heritage. In the fortress citadel of Mithradatkirt (Old Nisa), fragments of ceremonial armour for warhorses were found in the storerooms of the Square House, including a horse cloth embellished with metallic

[856] Book of Esther, 6.7-9; see also Russell (1990). A painted scene of Mordecai's triumph was depicted on the mid-3rd century AD synagogue of Dura Europos, showing Mordecai mounted on a white horse, dressed in Parthian attire consisting of trousers and a royal jacket hemmed with gold, and carrying a quiver of arrows and bow at his side; see Sommer (2016), 62, pl. X.
[857] Cassius Dio, 63.2.
[858] *Shiji, 123*, translated in Watson (1968), 278.
[859] Cassius Dio, 40.26.4; also Plutarch *Crassus*, 31.2.

ornaments.[860] Across the citadel, a fragmented painted mural that once adorned the monumental Tower-Building depicts a scene involving Iranian riders. Pilipko and Invernizzi have interpreted this reconstructed section of the mural as part of a vivid equestrian battle between two Iranian groups, representing either a conflict from the Arsacids' recent history or an episode from their mythological past.[861] This battle-scene concept from Nisa can be compared to similar painted equestrian friezes that are known from sites in Central Asia.[862] In archaeological sites from further afield, the presence of sacrificed horses in the burials of noble Scythians indicates the value and prestige that was attached to these animals amongst the horse-riding populations of the steppe.[863] From the frozen tombs of the Pazyryk region of the Altai Mountains, magnificent horse headdresses decorated with golf leaf were discovered; the designs include antler horns, an ibex horn, and the head of a horned mythical creature (found next to a second pair of false horns).[864] The horses were also buried with other wooden ornaments covered in gold and silver foil.

Mythical winged horses in the art and culture of the Parthian Empire is less explicit. At the Parthian city of Nisa, the ivory rhytons unearthed at Nisa display a plethora of mythical creatures on the terminals of the drinking vessels, including a centaur figure with wings drawn backwards as he charges into the air.[865] The interpretation of these objects, which encompass Hellenistic and

[860] Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 16.
[861] Pilipko (2000); Invernizzi (2001), 151-152; *ibid*. (2011a), 200-203. In the Parthian-influenced heroic section of the *Shahnameh*, clashes with nomadic riders became mythologised in the battles fought between Iran and Turan over the glorious *khvarnah*; Malandra (1983), 22.
[862] Invernizzi (2011a), 200-201 highlights the painted murals from the palace at Khalchayan (southern Uzbekistan), which date to the mid-1st century BC during the early Kushan period. Nehru (2006) [2006] describes these paintings: "Two panels depict Kushan rulers, other members of the ruling aristocracy, and a Parthian ally (their nomad neighbour to the west), all shown frontally, seated or standing, watched over by patron deities drawn from West Asian, Iranian, and Hellenistic pantheons (Cybele, Mithra, Heracles, Athena, Nike). The third panel, with figures on horseback, probably represents the victory of the Yuezhi/Kushans over their rivals in Bactria, the nomad Sakas." In a later period, the 8th century AD wall paintings from Panjikent depict similar scenes in a version of the Rustam Cycle, as well as local heroes battling adversaries on horseback; see generally Azarpay (1981), 95-102, figs. 42-44, pls.4-11; Marshak (2002), 25-54, pl. 13, fig. 14; Mode (2009) [2009].
[863] Herodotus', 4.71-72 version of the Scythian royal burials describes horses being sacrificed, bridled and arranged around the king's burial chamber. Ivantchik (2011b) examines the Greek author's account against archaeological evidence from sites on the northern side of the Black Sea.
[864] Rudenko (1960), pl. xxxviii; *ibid*. (1970), 179-186, pls. 119-122.
[865] Pappalardo (2010), 259-263.

Iranian artistic elements, requires a careful and nuanced approach when considering the thought processes behind their creation and their use. The centaur terminal figure (and others showing winged leonine griffins, elephants and bull-men) were considered by the excavators Masson and Pugačenkova to represent cultic emblems or deities, who acted as guardians to ward off evil from the royal household in a similar function to mythical creatures as seen on Achaemenid palaces.[866] More recent studies carried out on the rhyta by Pappalardo focus on the themes of triumph, immortality and heroism[867] – subjects to glorify the Arsacid's dynasty's rise to power. Invernizzi has similarly proposed that the rhytons were created as a "celebration of [Arsacid] kingship in life and beyond death", which corresponds to the main purpose of the artworks and architectural monuments of the Nisa citadel.[868]

Whilst the winged griffin and bull-man (or Assyrian Lamassu and Iranian Gopatshah)[869] terminals from Nisa can be compared to the iconography of the Persian and Assyrian palaces in south-western Iran and Iraq, the winged elephant and centaur terminals have no previous iconographic parallels in the Iranian world. The winged elephant (as well as the ivory material of the rhytons) plainly shows Parthia's links with Bactria and Arachosia, also known as "White India".[870] On some of the terminals depicting a centaur, the mythical figure

[866] Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 128-129 suggest that during the Achaemenid period, similar mythical beasts evolved from tribal, animistic totems of a pre-Zoroastrian age into protectors of the ruling Achaemenid kings who defended Ahura Mazda's supremacy on earth. Scenes on cylinder seals display the heroic king battling against such creatures, "struggling for the sole, centralised, state religion of Ahura-Mazda, against the Daevas and the ancient tribal beliefs". However, on the Apadana friezes at the Palace of Artaxerxes II in Susa, these creatures walk in a heraldic procession as fearful guardians of the king and as servants of Ahura Mazda. The excavators found that the mythical creatures on the terminals of the ivory rhytons from Nisa "convincingly belie the universal belief that the art of the Arsacid period had broken away from the artistic tradition of the Achaemenids"; however, the Arsacid interpretation of Achaemenid art forms were not simply mechanical repetition, but was "a new step in the development of a style and the artistic form of an image. The [griffin] figure springs, dynamically instead of walking slowly"; Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 130.

[867] Pappalardo (2010), 309; Pappalardo mentions specifically the appearance on several rhyta friezes of the Greek god Dionysus, who was reared in a mythical mountainous location known as Nysa. Although best known as the god of wine and viticulture, Dionysus was also celebrated (particularly from the time of the Hellenistic kings) for his transformation from human to divine, and for his triumph over Asiatic lands including India; see OCD, 479-482.

[868] Invernizzi (2013), 95.

[869] Potts (2002).

[870] Isidore of Charax, §19.

carries a woman in his arms whose hair is styled in a Parthian or Bactrian fashion.[871] Some of the centaur terminals also show feline skins tied around the neck (in the style of the Hellenistic deities Herakles or Dionysus), and perhaps scalps hanging from their shoulders (reminiscent of some Scythian warrior practices).[872] The centaur figures clearly come from a Greek mythological tradition. However, the addition of the wings (as well as the more local facial features and hairstyles) hints at a more native conception behind the design. Masson and Pugačenkova highlight that this phenomenon of "free interpretation of the cultic images of the East, combining them with motifs and characters of Greek mythology, was very typical of the epoch of Hellenism when the judgements and ideologies of various peoples mingled."[873] Pappalardo's more recent studies of the rhyta echoe this sentiment, arguing that older traditions from the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods were adapted under the Parthians. She states, "[Nisa] becomes an ideal site for the formation of a school where new tendencies blend together with ancient traditions, filtered by individuals of different origin. It is the ideal place to experiment with new forms of representation and to adapt the new figurative language to the self-representative exigencies of the ruling class."[874] From Pappalardo's analysis, it has been shown that "more than one generation of craftsmen worked on ivory rhytons, the subsequent ones adapting what had already been assimilated and experimented by the previous ones, to new formal conceptions of representation for which, evidently, the Hellenistic schemes were no more useful".[875]

[871] Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 131-135.
[872] For example, Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 82, no. 76, pl. 42 – note, Pappalardo (2010), 259 identifies this less specifically as a round element or a rocerodotus, 4.64-65 recounts how the Scythian nomads living in the Black Sea region are said to behead their defeated enemies to win favour with their king, and then hang the scalp from their horse's bridle. Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.2.14 tells a similar story about the Iranian Alani nomads; whilst Sima Qian's *Shiji* 123, translated in Watson (1968), 267-268 mentions that the leader of the Xiongnu nomads cut off the head of the defeated Yuezhi leader, and fashioned it into a drinking vessel.
[873] Masson & Pugačenkova (1982), 134. On the subject of Greek art forms combining with local tastes, see recent discussions in Boardman (1994), 86 ff.; Invernizzi (2000), 50; *ibid*. (2011a), 191; *ibid*. (2011b), 662, 665; Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 9; Pappalardo (2013), 56; Sinisi (2014), 49.
[874] Pappalardo (2013), 56.
[875] *Ibid*.

In the Greek tradition, centaurs represented the lowest, barbarian instincts of mankind, and were often involved in tales of violence and strife – themes that were commonly used in the accounts of the Graeco-Roman world to describe the nomadic tribes of the north-eastern Iranian world. However, in considering the rhytons from an Iranian perspective, Masson and Pugačenkova identified the Zoroastrian *yazata* Tishtrya as the source of inspiration for the terminal centaur figure, citing the divine being's cosmic battle in the form of a powerful warrior and a white stallion in the *Yasht* dedicated to this divinity.[876] Tishtrya soars to the heavenly Vouru-kasha Sea to defeat his opponent Apaosha, and draws to the earth the rains and rivers needed to nourish human, animal and plant life. In this interpretation, the rhytons function as ritual objects concerning fertility, and by association the prosperity of the ruling Arsacid dynasty over its subjects. These objects may have been used as part of royal banqueting or religious ceremonies at the fortress city.

Taking into account archaeological material from further afield, evidence from a Scythian burial in Volodarka on the Ural River (western Kazakhstan) provides a depiction of the mythical Pegasus. A pair of silver phalerae that formed part of a horse's bridle shows the Greek hero Bellerophon riding the winged horse as he attacks the monstrous Chimera. In his detailed assessment of the phalerae, Treister proposes that these pieces originated from a Parthian or Graeco-Bactrian workshop, and date to around 150-125 BC.[877] The objects were found within a warrior's burial, alongside weapons including a Chinese-style long sword that rested to the left of the deceased, a dagger strapped to his right hip (in cavalry style), and a quiver full of arrows.[878] Treister concludes that the phalerae had been looted during the bellicose tribal migrations of this period, when the Xiongnu were pushed westwards by the Han of China, and in turn put pressure on the Yuezhi, who eventually cause the collapse of the Graeco-Bactrian kingdom.[879] The silver phalerae that were buried in western

[876] *Yt*. 8.13-14, 18, 20. See also Pappalardo (2010), 260.
[877] Treister (2012), 95.
[878] Tresister (2012), 87-92.
[879] Tresister (2012), 93-94. The theme of Bellerophon and his mythical steed is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East: a group of nineteen bullae dating from the 2nd century BC to the 1st century

Kazakhstan had been produced in a Parthian or Graeco-Bactrian workshop familiar with the Greek subject; nevertheless, aspects of the design also indicate near eastern (and specifically Parthian) influences.[880] In the Iranian sphere, the mythical hero Rustam and his swift horse of legendary strength Rakhsh, who battle against the White Div, were perhaps invoked by this scene, or the divine *yazatas*, such as Tishtrya, who battles against *daevas* and monsters in the form of a soaring horse.

The perception that Iranian *yazatas* could manifest themselves into distinct zoomorphic guises is evident from the sacred Avestan *Yashts*. The horse was clearly embedded into the hymns of the Mazdaean religion, and woven into the dynastic mythology of the Arsacid House. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the Arsacid ancestor known in the *Shahnameh* as the archer Arash appears in *Yasht* 8 as the hero Erekhsha. In this hymn, Erekhsha's swift arrow is likened to the flight of Tishtrya, who soars across the heavens in the form of a white horse with golden ears and golden caparisons.[881] In this equine incarnation, Tishtrya battles against Apaosha, a demon inhabiting the form of a black horse, in order to liberate the rainwaters from the Vouru-kasha Sea, and deliver them to the pious Iranian nations. In defeating the evil Apaosha, Tishtrya brings fertility and prosperity to the world. This theme is mirrored in the exploits of heroes such as Erekhsha/Arash, who battle against Iran's enemies to secure order, prosperity and a divine mandate in the form of the luminous *khvarnah*. Soudavar considers the winged horse to be one of Tishtrya's symbols, pointing to Sasanian textiles that show winged horses decorated with diadem ties, and often surrounded by plant patterns or a star motif.[882]

AD were found at the Armenian city of Artaxata, showing the image of the Greek hero and his mythical steed engaged in battle against the Chimera; Treister (2012), 70, note 40 with bibliography.

[880] Treister (2012), 68 ff. highlights the clothing worn by Bellerophon, the style of Pegasus' mane, the Chimera's lion head, and the manner in which the scene overlaps onto the garland frieze encircling the whole scene, amongst other details.

[881] Yt. 8.6-8, 18; the *yazata* also transforms into the form of a young warrior (Yt. 8.13) and a bull with golden horns (Yt. 8.16), though these incarnations play a lesser role in the hymn.

[882] Soudavar (2009), 428, fig. 33. See also note 724 above on the false folk etymology of the divine being Tir that is associated with Middle Persian *tīr* "arrow.

A second *yazata* who takes the form of a white horse (also with golden ears and trappings) is Verethragna, the yazata of 'Strength' and 'Victory'. *Yasht* 8 describes this divine being's powers to deliver strength and victory to his worshippers, thus securing them the divine *khvarnah*:

> "The good Mazdā-created xwarənah he bore, the Mazdā-created xwarənah, curativeness and strength. Then strongest (Wərəthraghna said) to him: In strength I am the strongest, in valour I am the most valourous, in xwarənah I am most in possession of xwarənah, in favour I am most bestowing of favour, in weal I am most bestowing of weal, in curativeness I am most curative. Then I shall overcome hostilities, the hostilities of all enemies, the hostilities of daēwas and men, sorcerers and witches, tyrants, kawis, and karapans."[883]

While Verethragna takes ten incarnations in the *Yasht*, these distinct verses are reserved for only the first three of his avatars: a beautiful wind, the white bull with golden horns, and the white horse with golden ears and caparisons. The prime position of these verses in the hymn and the special role of the divine being's bull and horse forms (which also uniquely share golden features) reflect the importance of these animals in Iranian religious ritual.[884]

Another important *yazata* to highlight is Druvaspa, whose name descriptively means '[Possessing] Sound Horses'. Thought originally to be an archaic epithet of the chariot-driving Ashi, Druvaspa was transformed into a new female, chariot-driving divinity, "presumably after the Iranian warriors had learnt to harness the horse."[885] This *yazata* appears as a divine assistant to Geush Urvan (the Soul of the Bull) in the *Gosh Yasht*, though the hymn, in fact, repeats invocations from the *Yashts* dedicated to Ashi and Anahita.[886] In the 2nd

[883] Yt. 14.2-4, 9, translated in Malandra (1983).
[884] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 150-151.
[885] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 82.
[886] Anahita, as the divine being of the waters, bestows chariots, horses and arms on her worshippers, helping them towards victory in battle – favours not directly to do with her role as a river divinity. Many of the verses that speak of these attributes are also shared in the *Yasht* dedicated to Ashi (17). Boyce (1989) [2011] suggests, "…there seems to have been some blurring of identity between these two beautiful, chariot-driving goddesses… it seems probable that, as [Ashi] suffered gradual eclipse by Arədvī Sūrā [Anahita], verses once addressed to her were transferred to her rival, so that gifts properly sought from the goddess of Fortune came to be asked of the river-goddess."

century AD, this *yazata* was depicted on the coinage of the Kushan Kanishka (c. AD 127-151), now as a male deity identified in the Bactrian script legend as *Λροοασπο* (previously read as 'Lrooaspo').[887] In the coin's iconography, the *yazata* is shown in anthropomorphic form, holding a diadem band, and standing next to a horse.[888]

Like Druvaspa in her chariot, horses accompany various other Iranian *yazatas* and respond to their divine powers. Ashi, who epitomises the concept of 'Reward' or 'Fortune', can make the galloping mounts of warriors arouse fear as they strain against their leather trappings.[889] It is thought that in pre-Mazdaean times, Ashi was a powerful divine being who was worshipped by warriors.[890] This role was perhaps transposed onto Druvaspa once she became a goddess in her own right. In the Middle Persian epic *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, an oath of restraint containing Parthian elements is requested of the king by the soothsayer Jamasp, "… rub three times for Dravasp (= Druvaspa) your sharp and shining sword and arrow made of jaw-bone, and say 'I will not strike you, I will not kill you…'"[891]

Mithra, the *yazata* of 'Contract' and 'Oath', and closely associated with the Kayanid *khvarnah* that drives before him as "blazing Fire", is also visualised as a chariot-driver.[892] He charges into battle spurring on his four white stallions, confounding all liars and sinners with blows, and striking down enemy horsemen vengefully with his club.[893] Mithra is known as the warrior of the "white horses", a master of "spears with sharp points and long shafts", and the

[887] Rosenfield (1967), 78-79.
[888] Curtis, V.S. (2016), 195 & fig. 36d.
[889] Yt. 17.12, translated in Malandra (1983), 133: "The horses of those whom you accompany, good Ashi, inspire fear; swift, snorting impetuously, they pull the fast chariot, strain at the leather; they convey the brave praiser (?) whose horses are swift, whose chariot is sturdy, whose spears are sharp and have long shafts, the far-shotting archer, pursuing the enemy from behind, slaying the foe in front."
[890] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 82.
[891] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §41, translated in Horne (1917), 216.
[892] Yt. 10.127, translated in Malandra (1983), 74.
[893] Yt. 10.47, 101, 125, translated in Malandra (1983), 64, 71, 73: "47. We worship Mithra of wide pastures […] notorious in his anger. (His) broad-hooved (horses) drive against the bloodthirsty enemy armies, against those drawn up in battle lines between the two warring countries"; "101. […] Then, when driving, he arrives there where the countries are hostile to Mithra; it is he who first strikes his club down on horse and man; at one he completely frightens both of them, horse and man […]"; "125. Four immortal, all white horse, who live on spiritual food, pull this chariot […]"

"far-shooting archer".[894] In *Yasht* 10, addressed to Mithra, mounted warriors worship the divinity as the giver of swift horses, bending down close to their animals' manes and entreating the *yazata* to supply them with speed and strength against their enemies.[895] Various allies accompany Mithra as he allots punishment to the wicked from his formidable chariot. Sraosha 'Hearkening (to divine command)' and Rashnu 'Justice' are similarly driven by four white and radiant supernatural horses; the former swiftly chase down enemies from his horse-drawn chariot that flies faster than two well-shot arrows, and smashes them with his bladed club.[896]

In a similarly martial fashion, *Yasht* 5 addressed to the river-divinity Anahita describes how kings and heroes entreat the goddess for boons, such as providing swift chariots, racehorses and warhorses, aid in capturing herds and flocks from their enemies, along with possession of the *khvarnah* that belongs to the Iranian peoples.[897] In the *Zamyad Yasht,* the enigmatic water divinity Apam Napat, who protects the royal glory or *khvarnah* that resides in the heavenly

[894] Yt. 10.102, translated in Malandra (1983), 71.

[895] Yt. 10.3, 11, translated in Malandra (1983), 59-60: "3. Mithra of the wide pastures gives possession of swift horses to those who are not false to a covenant […]"; "11. [We worship Mithra] whom the Warriors worship at (i.e., bending down close to) the manes of (their) horses, requesting strength for their teams, health for themselves, much watchfulness against enemies, the ability to retaliate against foes, the ability to overcome unfriendly, hostile opponents at a blow […]"

[896] Y. 57.27-32; Yt. 10.100, 126. These chariot-driving divine beings are closely linked ideologically: Ashi of 'Reward'/'Fortune' goes hand in hand with her brothers Mithra, Sraosha and Rashnu, and their personified qualities 'Contract', 'Hearkening' and 'Justice'. The three male divinities, who are associated with one another through intricate and overlapping alliances, have been viewed in light of man's preoccupation with social or behavioural aspects in life (e.g. keeping contracts, obedience to religious authority, administrating justice – all of which allows man to become a Sustainer of Order or *ashawan*), as well as in death (with the protection of the *ashawan*'s soul as it crosses the Chinwad Bridge, which is protected by the divine trio); *Dādestān ī Mēnōg ī Xrad*, 2.118. See also Boyce (1975a) [1996]; 240-241; Kreyenbroek (1985), 178; Curtis, V.S. (1993a), 14; Stewart (2007), 142; Skjærvø (2011), 32-33. Although often identified as 'Obedience', Kreyenbroek (1985), 13 translates this Sraosha's name as 'Hearkening (to divine command)' and interprets this as the personification of man's frame of mind that compels him to fight against evil – that is to obediently fulfill the will of Ahura Mazda. The close similarities between the hymns to Mithra and Sraosha, especially in the description of the chariots and martial characters of these divinities, has led to the theory that Sraosha, as the less archaic divinity on account of him having no overt Vedic counterpart, became strongly associated with Mithra and borrowed much from his persona as a divine warrior fighting against evil and upholding Truth; Gershevitch (1959) [1967], 58-61; Boyce (1975a) [1996], 60-62; Kreyenbroek (1985), 165-166, 175. Later, possibly in the Parthian period, Sraosha developed a more independent function as the 'Lord of this World', an intermediary between the mortal and the divine, and presiding over correct performance of ritual and prayer in order to reinforce the Sacred Word or *mathra* of Ahura Mazda.

[897] Yt. 5. 26, 50, 86.

Vouru-kasha Sea, is invoked as the "lofty Ahura (lord), imperial, regal… whose horses are swift, the hero who brings help when invoked…"[898] In his equine form Tishtrya of the rainwaters also offers his worshippers wealth in horses and purification of the soul after receiving libations of milk and *haoma*.[899]

Boons and invocations to the divine world cover many aspects of daily life, for the individual and for the community, petitioning both material and immaterial rewards.[900] However, the most frequent petitions in the *Yashts*, according to Stewart's study, concern martial traits: the defeat of enemies in battle and the defeat of the *daevas*, the granting of swift horses and strong warriors, protection from hostile blows and watchfulness against enemy movements, etc. These boons are asked principally from Mithra (Yt. 10) and Anahita (Yt. 5), from Mazda-created *khvarnah* (Yt. 19), and from the Fravashis (Yt. 13), a band of guardian spirit warriors who ride into battle on chariots and the ancestors of the Iranian peoples.[901] These kinds of boon are also, although less frequently, made out to Verethragna (Yt. 14), the 'Smiter of Resistance', and the warrior-like Vayu (Yt. 15) of the swift and fierce wind; to Ashi (Yt. 17) governing 'Reward' and Druvaspa (Yt. 9) 'Possessing Sound Horses'; to Tishtrya (Yt. 8), who battles the wicked Apaosha in the form of a white horse; to Ahura Mazda (Yt. 1); and to Sraosha (Y. 57), who wields his destructive club from his chariot.[902] The image conjured by these violent equestrian battles fought by heroes and their patron divinities, it is thought, belongs to an earlier age of strife - not in the form of large organised armies, but as raids on cattle pastures. Malandra explains, "many of the gods and heroes of myth and legend represent the ideal Aryan warrior who is able to smash the defences of his opponents and

[898] Yt. 19.52.
[899] Yt. 8.19.
[900] Stewart (2007), 141-142 numerates the different kinds of boons that appear in the Yashts.
[901] Yt. 13.26 ff. places a strong emphasis on the invocation of the Fravashis in battle, and their protection over their warrior descendants and other creations. See Stewart (2007), 140.
[902] Stewart (2007), 142, table 1: 21 verses in the *Mihr Yasht* contain petitions to the *yazata* for martial success against enemies and *daevas*, and other associated boons; 17 verses in the *Yasht* to Anahita contain similar requests for aid in battles; 13 verses in the *Zamyad Yasht* to the *khvarnah*; and 15 verses in the *Yasht* to the Fravashis. The *Yashts* to Verethragna and Vayu each contain 7 verses that deal with these martial boons; with 2 verses each in the *Yashts* to Ashi and Druvaspa; 3 verses each in the *Yashts* to Ahura Mazda and Tishtrya; and 1 verse in the *Yasht* to Sraosha.

liberate their cattle."[903] This environment, however, is not so far removed from the description of the tribal skirmishes and raids reported in the Graeco-Roman and Chinese literature. That the horse appears so conspicuously in the *Yashts* (particularly accompanying warriors into battle, and as the driving force behind the chariots of warring *yazatas*), as well as in the later Iranian epics, in the accounts of Greek and Roman observers of Parthia, and in the art and iconography of Parthian material culture should be no surprise. As Mazda-worshippers, the culture and ideology of the Arsacid kings was strongly influenced by the Avestan tradition; furthermore, it is evident from the heroic section of the *Shahnameh* that the Arsacids sought to embed their own dynastic origin story into the legendary battles of the Kayanid kings, the warrior Erekhsha and the *yazata* Tishtrya through the figure of Kay Arash. The selection of horse iconography on the Parthian bronzes was not simply a practical continuation of the Seleucid repertoire, but was chosen to encapsulate the character and ideology of the new Arsacid kings.

Horses in Similes and Metaphors

In the Avestan hymns, the horse also features in other roles aside from the martial escapades of the *yazatas* and Iranian warriors. The animal is assimilated to the natural world, for example, as the "swift-horse" sun that Mithra accompanies across the sky. This swift-horsed sun, the *Mihr Yasht* declares, rises first over Iranian lands, specifically those that border the barbarous world: Parutian Ishkata in the Koh-i-Baba Mountains (Helmand, Afghanistan), Haraiwan Margu near Merv (Mary, Turkmenistan), Sogdian Gawa (Samarkand and Bukhara, Uzbekistan) and Chorasmia where the Oxus River flows.[904] In the *Xwarshed Yasht*, a sacrifice is offered to the swift-horsed Sun in order to protect worshippers from darkness, from the *daevas* born from

[903] Malandra (1983), 7. See also Boyce (1975a) [1996], 210-211; Heesterman (1993), 4, 83; Stewart (2007), 143.
[904] Yt. 10.13-14; Malandra (1983), 60 with notes 22-25; see also Yt. 6.1 ff.

darkness, and from bandits, who make their raids from the murky, barbarous world beyond the borders of the Mazda-worshippers.[905]

A second association between the horse and the natural world can be observed: strong and fast-flowing river currents are likened to the horse's rapid gallop. The nourishing waters that crash along these river routes were strongly welcomed in settlements and pasturelands.[906] After battling against the demon Apaosha on the banks of the heavenly Vouru-kasha Sea, the *yazata* Tishtrya meanders with the waters through inlets and streams towards the earth in the shape of a white horse.[907] Similarly, the flowing rivers of the aquatic *yazata* Apam Napat are personified as swift horses.[908] Anahita, the lady of the waters, was also assimilated to the movement of rivers: she is described with strong, flowing white arms, stronger than a horse.[909] Like Tishtrya, Anahita flows along the surging rivers, streams and outlets that bring the waters down from the Vouru-kasha Sea, with each conduit stretching out at a distance of forty days' ride for a man travelling on horseback.[910] This description is considered to be the more ancient personification of the goddess. In *Yasht* 5, Anahita is also personified as a woman wearing jewels and beaver skins, and driving a chariot drawn by four stallions embodying Wind, Rain, Clouds and Hail.[911] The latter description, it is thought, derived from a cult image of the goddess, and demonstrates the changing nature of her worship as the hymns were transmitted and transformed by oral recitation across different regions or worshippers.[912] What is evident from both personifications is that Anahita was

[905] Protection from sorcerers and creeping death is also sought; Yt. 6.4. See Curtis, V.S. (1993a), 21-24.
[906] Yt. 8.5, 42.
[907] Yt. 8.46-47.
[908] Yt. 19.51-52.
[909] Yt. 5.7.
[910] Yt. 5.4.
[911] Yt. 5.120-129.
[912] Boyce (1982), 203; Stewart (2007), 139-140. See p. 243, note 886 above on the discussion outlined by Boyce that Anahita inherited these newer characteristics from Ashi. Malandra (1983), 119 notes "It is obvious from the nature of that description that beavers were not known to the audience for whom the Yasht was redacted. The Old World beaver (*Castor fiber*) did not range south of the Caspian nor along the rivers and lakes of the Aral-Caspian steppe, but was plentiful in the Caucasus. In fact, Herodotus (IV.109) mentions beaver among the Scythians, and in Roman imperial times, beaver from the Black Sea area (called 'Pontic dog', *canis ponticus*) was an item of active

continually connected to ideas about water and horses, and their interrelated natures.

Another comparison worth highlighting is that of the speed of horses compared to the flight of arrows. As mentioned above, the flight of the *yazata* Tishtrya as he soars in the shape of a white and golden horse to battle against Apaosha is compared to the mighty arrow of Erekhsha. A comparable description is provided for Sraosha, whose chariot is pulled by four supernatural white and golden-hooved horses that shoot across the sky faster than two well-shot arrows.[913]

The metaphors and similes presented in these sacred texts were pervasive in later centuries, and this is particularly evident from the epics that were rooted in Parthian oral compositions. In these legendary poems, the mounts of kings and his subjects are compared to rolling waves of water, and the swift flight of an arrow. For example, in the epic of *Vis and Ramin* the mounts of King Mobad and his entourage crash down like waves of water as they prepare for a hunt: "The castle rang with din, with drums and bells, / With bugles, brazen hooves, and ostlers' yells, / And mounted men emerged in companies / Jostling like boughs of blossom on the trees, / Surging from Marv like some great wave that rears / To fearsome heights before it disappears" (cited previously on p. 236).[914] In the following passages, the horse ridden by King Mobad seems to take flight, whilst the mounts of Prince Ramin and the messenger Azin are compared to swift arrows: "[Mobad] chose a horse so swift it seemed to fly / As quickly as the clouds across the sky";[915] "The letter was completed, and Azin, / Sped like a gusting wind from Prince Ramin. / Ramin came after him with all the haste / Of polo players when the ball is chased - / Both rode for Khorasan, and neither thought / A moment of the trials the

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trade. Perhaps Anāhitā was a local goddess of the extreme northwest whose cult, for whatever reasons, diffused throughout western Iran, eventually to join with that of Inanna-Ishtar."

[913] Yt. 7.6-7, 37-38; Y. 57.27-29.

[914] Translation in Davis (2008), 460.

[915] Davis (2008), 171.

journey brought. / Two arrows flying with a single flight, / There was a day between them, and a night."[916]

Horses and Blood Sacrifice

In *Yasht* 5, addressed to the goddess Anahita, a hundred stallions are among the sacrificial victims that kings and heroes offer to the goddess in exchange for boons; the other blood offerings comprise a thousand cows and ten thousand sheep.[917] The differentiation in these numbers suggests that the horse was the highest-valued animal, hence fewer were remove from the worshippers' herds for this ritual slaughter. Following the sacrifice, it is presumed that the animal was portioned out: the jaw, tongue and left eye were offered to Haoma (Yt. 11.4), while the rest of the cooked meat was distributed to the ritual priest and to the community (Yt. 11.1).[918] However, few details are known on the nature and regularity of these blood sacrifices.

The sacrifice of horses to divinities in the Iranian world is better known from descriptive episodes dating to the Achaemenid and Parthian periods in western sources. According to various Greek authors, the association between the horse and the sun was recognised through the ritual sacrifice of the animal to a solar divinity, which may have been identified as Mithra.[919] The historian and mercenary Xenophon recounted his travels in Armenia where horses were reared for the Achaemenid king as tribute, and fattened in order to be sacrificed to the Sun God.[920] Strabo, writing later in the 1st century BC, also mentions that

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[916] *Ibid*., 390.

[917] Yt. 5.21, 25, 29, etc. These numbers are repeated in the *Yasht* as a formulaic phrase, and reflect an idealised (and memorable) quantity for the oral performance of this hymn. In his work *The Anabasis of Alexander*, 3.17.5, Arrian tells of a similar hierarchy of animals (and perhaps a similar exaggeration in quantities) in his account of the tribute that was extracted from the Ouxioi tribe of Susiana: 100 horses, 500 pack animals and 30,000 sheep.

[918] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 160; Stewart (2007), 139.

[919] Although Mithra is chiefly known as the *yazata* of 'Contract' and 'Oath', his solar identification is evident from the *Mihr Yasht* where he flies with the sun as it travels over the earth. Mithra's strong association with fire also links the *yazata* to the sun, as both fiery elements sustain life. Fire may be used to determine whether an oath has been broken (in a 'trial by fire'), and such deviations from Truth do not go unnoticed by the ever-watchful Mithra. By the light of the vigilant sun and luminaries, the "ever watchful" Mithra (Yt. 10.7, 144) patrols the earth for those who are false to the contract; see Boyce (1975a) [1996], 28-29; Malandra (1983), 58; Soudavar (2014), 53, 273-274.

[920] Xenophon *Anabasis*, 4.5.34-35.

Nisaean horses were bred in Armenia, and that the satrap sent twenty thousand young males annually to the Persian king for the Mithrakana festival.[921] This celebration gave thanks to Mithra at the autumn equinox, once the "swift-horse" sun had ripened the crops and accordingly helped to fatten the herds.[922] Justin's epitome also states that horses were sacred to the solar deity, and were considered to be conduits that communicated the god's will to his Persian worshippers – in this case to choose a king from amongst the Persian noblemen.[923] A royal preoccupation with horse sacrifice was also noted in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, where the author describes a monumental ceremony that was carried out during Cyrus' lifetime (so he claims). In this ceremony, horses were sacrificed to the Sun to demonstrate the king's magnificence and splendour. These horses, alongside sacrificial bulls, were led to the sanctuaries before a procession of chariots drawn by richly decorated horses in golden bridles and caparisons.[924] The historicity of Xenophon's account has often been questioned; however, he perhaps constructed this ceremony based on elements of royal Achaemenid ritual that he witnessed or heard about during the expedition against Artaxerxes II in 401 BC. Writing much later in the 2nd century AD, the historian Arrian remarked that during the Achaemenid period, priests sacrificed a horse each month before Cyrus' tomb to honour the deceased king.[925] Boyce suggests that this practice resonates with a Vedic notion of securing a place near the sun for the king's spirit.[926] The sacrifice of horses to a Sun God was also notably practiced by the eastern Iranian Massagetae, according to Strabo and Herodotus, who added that this was because the swiftest animal was thought to be the best offering to the swiftest god.[927] The practice of horse sacrifice to the Sun was continued ostensibly into the Parthian period. Philostratus' 3rd century work, *Life of Apollonius*, relates how the Parthian king Vardanes I (c. AD 40-45) sacrificed a Nisaean horse adorned with

[921] Strabo, 11.14.9.
[922] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 173-174.
[923] Justin, 1.10.3-5.
[924] Xenophon *Cyropaedia*, 8.3.12, 24.
[925] Arrian *Anabasis*, 6.29.7.
[926] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 122. See also Briant (1996) [2002], 95-96; Soudavar (2014), 43-45, 279-280.
[927] Herodotus, 1.216; Strabo, 11.8.6.

ornamental trappings to the Sun, wishing to travel as far across the earth as the sun does.[928]

The written sources from the western sphere are clearly problematic in that they were attempting to describe and interpret Iranian rituals that they either saw or heard about, but probably did not fully comprehend. Nevertheless, the common themes that run throughout these sources indicate that the Sun God was a divinity who was highly venerated by kings. This solar divinity was associated with the horse in both ritual and hymn - as was Mithra, although he is referred to only in the account of Strabo on the Mithrakana festival. The popularity of Mithra within the royal sphere is notable in other forms: in the Achaemenid period, Artaxerxes II (404-358 BC) invoked this divine being directly in his building inscriptions alongside Ahura Mazda, and occasionally Anahita.[929] The continued popularity of Mithra into later centuries is evident from the prevalence of the powerful throne name 'Mithradates' amongst Arsacid and Pontic kings, as well as other figures in the ancient Near East.[930]

The sacrifice of horses to river divinities is also attested in Graeco-Roman sources. Herodotus recounts that during the march of Xerxes I's army towards Greece, the Magi sacrificed white horses at the River Strymon in Thrace, seeking good omens from the river god.[931] This ritual practice is also noted in the Parthian period: Justin claims that the Parthians were venerators of rivers.[932] Tacitus narrates an episode in which the Parthian prince Tiridates, who had been living in exile in Rome, was escorted to the east across the

[928] Philostratus *Life of Apollonius*, 1.31.
[929] A^2Ha, A^2Hb, A^2Sa, A^2Sd; see Kent (1950) [1953], 154-155.
[930] The Seleucid king Antiochus IV (175-164 BC), born from a Seleucid father, Antiochus III, and a Seleucid-Pontic mother, Laodice III, was apparently named 'Mithradates' at birth. He adopted the name Antiochus when he took the throne; see Livy, 33.19.9, where the son of Antiochus III is named as 'Mithradates' during his father's campaign into Asia Minor (197 BC). By the time of the Treaty of Apamea (188 BC), he had been given the name 'Antiochus'; see Appian's *Syriaca*, 39. Other names inspired by Mithra are evident within the royal court of the Asracid kings: the *Astronomical Diaries* name two 'Chief of Troops' (Mitradātâ and Mitrāṭu) and a Governor of Babylon (Raznumitra) who were active during the late 2nd-early 1st centuries BC; see, for example, Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -111, C, 4; no. -90, Obv. 15-17; no. -82, B Rev., 5; Shayegan (2011), 198 ff., table 10.
[931] Herodotus, 7.113.
[932] Justin, 41.3.6.

Euphrates to seize the Parthian throne. The prince reportedly sacrificed a horse to placate the river.[933]

The accounts noted above derive from the exoteric perspective of western observers on the act of ritual sacrifice in the Iranian world. From the *Yashts* it is evident that divinities were invited to descend from the divine world to partake of offerings that were prepared within a purified area, and that were intended to give strength to the *yazata* (not in order to pacify specific gods, as was often the case in the Greek and Roman pantheons); in return, the *yazata* would grant boons or rewards, such as the provision of water and food, good health, wisdom, victory, etc. It is the enemies of Ahura Mazda's worshippers who encounter the formidable characters of divinities such as Mithra, and not the worshippers themselves who need to appease a vengeful *yazata*. Offerings of horses to the so-called Sun God are not explained in great detail in the Graeco-Roman sources; however a passage in *Yasht* 6 describes how sacrifices made to the "life-giving sun, magnificent, swift-horsed" strengthen the divinity's powers against the *daevas* born of darkness, as well as bandits, sorcerers and creeping death.[934] The sun's light, the hymn states, purifies the earth, the waters and all creations, giving divinities a place to abide in the world of mortals. Here, the act of sacrifice serves to strengthen the *yazatas* for the common good of the divine universe and the mortal world. Sacrifice, as a bond between mortals performing the appropriate rites and the divine world receiving them, thus falls under the protection of Mithra, the *yazata* of 'Contract' and 'Oath'.[935]

In *Yasht* 5, the kinds of sites where acts of worship take place in the open air are described; for example, on a top or at the foot of a mountain, by a lake or by a river.[936] These places – although they may have been associated with specific local deities as suggested by Herodotus and Tacitus – resonate with universal Mazdaean ideas about the purity of water as a creation of Ahura Mazda, and its unpolluted nature that allows it to be an appropriate site for the

[933] Tacitus *Annals*, 6.37.
[934] Yt. 6.2-4, translated in Boyce (1975a) [1996], 147.
[935] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 148.
[936] Stewart (2007), 140; see Yt. 5.21, 25, 37, 45, 49, 76, 81.

performance of rituals.[937] Water, moreover, is understood as a vital source of life and nourishment, and so offerings to the sacred element form a central part of the Mazdaean act of worship or *yasna*.[938] Justin's observation of the Parthians' veneration of rivers resonates with these notions. However, the concept of horse (or any blood) sacrifice to fire or water is absent from the *yasna* as it exists now, and instead it is an offering prepared from the *haoma* plant that characterises the ritual. It appears that those blood sacrifices mentioned in the *Yashts* were "an act of supererogation on the part of the laity, not to be confused with that of the *yasna*"[939], and were requested on special occasions, such as before a great undertaking or battle.

The Persepolis Fortification Tablets demonstrate that animal sacrifices were not uncommon during the reign of Darius I in the Achaemenid period, and these were performed in the Fars region, for example, at the ceremonial *šip* feast in Pasargadae and for the funerary cult of deceased members of the Persian royalty and aristocracy.[940] The sacrificial animals listed on these tablets include cattle and sheep, and were provided by the royal sphere; conversely, no horses are mentioned for this role in the fragmented tablets that have so far been examined. It has been suggested that the sacrifice of horses (as referred to in the Avestan *Yashts* and the Graeco-Roman secondary accounts) was reserved for extraordinary occasions.[941]

The evidence presented in the Graeco-Roman sources makes a focal point of horse sacrifice amongst the Achaemenid and Parthian kings; while the Avestan evidence suggests that blood offerings were given on particularly special occasions. The high value of the horse, which according to *Yasht* 5 was

[937] Stewart (2007), 140.
[938] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 155-156.
[939] Stewart (2007), 140. See also Malandra (2010) [2010].
[940] Henkelman (2005), 143-145, 158; *ibid*. (2011), 119-120. Early scholarship on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets took the view that animal sacrifice was taboo under the Zoroastrian Achaemenid kings, and created difficulties for the administration in the handling of animals that were to be used in ritual sacrifices carried out for non-Iranian gods. Perspectives have since shifted on this topic, alongside views on the religion of the Achaemenid kings and their tolerance of other religions; see Henkelman (2005), 138-143, 156 for further discussion on the earlier scholarship, and the administrative provision of animals for sacrifice as described in these tablets.
[941] Briant (1996) [2002], 96; Stewart (2007), 139.

sacrificed in fewer numbers than the cow or sheep, suggest that this particular victim was reserved for sacrifices "charged with great significance" and had to be carried out in a manner that was ritually proper to validate the taking of the prized animal's life.[942] This comes into contrast with the actions of the daeva-worshipping hoards, who raided herds and performed violent and bloody sacrifices that break the animal's back, stretch out its limbs and gorge out its eyes.[943] The Lament of the Geush Urvan ('Soul of the Ox') in *Yasna* 29 encapsulates this dichotomy between the slaughter of sacrificial animals carried out with fury and violence by cattle raiders, and the measured blood offerings that were carried out by Mazda-worshippers and that raised the victim's soul from its material body.[944] The soul of the sacrificed animal was understood to be transferred from the corporeal world and given as nourishment to the divine world; this act defines the reciprocal relationship between human and divine.[945] Given that the material remains of the animal were returned to the worshippers in the form of a communal meal, it would not have been practical to use the community's most valuable and practical animal commodity. At one time in a remote pastoral era, this would have been the cow (as is evident from the Cow's Lament), but in later centuries the domesticated animal that characterised the lives of many Iranian peoples was the horse.[946]

As per the Graeco-Roman accounts, the extraordinary situations that called for a sacrifice of horses included the annual Mithrakana feast, the choosing of a new Achaemenid king, the exceptional display of royal magnificence and the funerary cult of Cyrus the Great, the preparation for an invasion under Xerxes, and the seizing of the Parthian throne by the rival prince Tiridates. In *Yasht* 5, the worshipping kings and warriors sacrifice horses in

[942] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 150-151.
[943] Yt. 14.54-56; Boyce (1975a) [1996], 171; Malandra (1983), 37.
[944] Y. 29.1, translated in Malandra (1983), 38: "The Soul of the Cow lamented to you: For whom have you determined me? Who fashioned me? Wrath and Violence, Harm, Daring, and Brutality (each) have bound me! I have no other pastor than you- so appear to me with good husbandry!"
[945] Stewart (2007), 140-141, with reference to Leach (1976), 83. Skjærvø (2011), 34-36 describes this process, "[The *Yasna*] is formed as a gift-exchange between guest-friends, in which the sacrifice offers up to Ahura Mazdā all that is needed for him to re-produce the new, fertile world, including bones and life breath, in return for which Ahura Mazdā recreates the world and renumerates his sacrificer."
[946] Boyce (1975a) [1996], 150-151.

order to uphold good over evil, to be granted triumphs over tyrants, demons, monsters, witches and sorcerers; to spread the good religion through victories over the *daevas*; to win chariot races with fast horses; and to receive the *khvarnah* through their superior character and deeds. The horses designated for these extraordinary sacrifices were probably selected from the king's own royal herds. Overall, the sacrifice of highly prized horses seems to have been principally attached to the royal sphere.

Thus, the image of the horse on Mithradates II's bronzes (which at first carried the letters MI, MP and AP above the horse's flank on the tetrachalkoi, perhaps in reference to the king's throne name, Mithradates, or dynastic name, Arsaces), as well as the horse head (sometimes horned) and mythical winged horse on later bronze issues, recalled ideas about the famed Parthian cavalry, the royal caravans that transported the king and nobles, the legendary ancestral heroes of the ruling dynasty, the divine *yazatas* incarnated as gleaming white stallions and driven in soaring chariots, as well as the royal sacrificial offerings to bolster their conquests and splendour.

The Bow and Club

While the image of the horse (realistic and mythological) or horse head characterised the majority of Mithradates II's bronze production, the smaller chalkoi units were characterised by two types of weapon: the early chalkoi show the Parthian composite bow in a case, while the later issues depict the club that is usually associated with the divine hero Herakles. On earlier Seleucid coinage, both bow and club were used alongside the image of the Greek Herakles, suggesting that they were strongly connected to the sphere of gods and heroes.

The bow was, of course, the famed weapon of the Parthian Empire and its feared mounted archers. For the Arsacids, it specifically linked the ruling dynasty to the legendary Kayanid ancestor, Arash, whose skill in archery secured the Iranian border after the *khvarnah* was won in the war against the

Turanians.[947] Like his legendary ancestor, Mithradates II secured the empire's eastern frontier against a nomadic invasion that had claimed the lives of two Arsacid kings before him. To the west of the Iranian highlands, Mithradates II had also sent armies to conquer Media Atropatene and extend the empire's border to the River Euphrates.[948] An extremely rare and, for this period, heavy bronze coin type of Mithradates II shows the usual "bow in case" motif on the reverse, with a palm branch arced prominently behind the weapon – presumably a victory issue of this king.[949]

In the centuries before the Arsacid-Parni's arrival in the Iranian Plateau, the composite bow was displayed as part of the costume of the Saka *tigraxauda* on the Apadana reliefs of Persepolis.[950] On Achaemenid period seals, the composite bow was drawn by warrior figures dressed in Scythian garb, whilst miniature models of the weapon fashioned out of golden wire (now in the Miho Museum) were uncovered with other "offerings" within the Oxus Treasure, and date broadly to the 5th-2nd centuries BC.[951] The Achaemenid kings (as well as their predecessors in the ancient Near East) placed great emphasis on the bow as a royal weapon, and were shown on reliefs carrying the simple bow with a single curve. As part of the king's entourage on these reliefs, the royal weapon-bearer dressed in Median costume carries a bow enclosed in a case.[952] On golden darics and silver sigloi, the Achaemenid royal hero was posed in action, holding a simple bow and quiver, sometimes alongside a long spear. These images embody the words of Darius I, who claimed on his tomb monument "I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback […] I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback."[953] While the Parthian kings carried on the tradition of showing the bow as a royal weapon, it was the double curved, composite bow

[947] Tafażżolī (1986) [2011] on the Islamic period sources for the archer Arash; Davis (2007), 141, 529; Yt. 8.6-7, 37-38.
[948] Curtis, V.S., *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[949] In the collection of the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, no. 18208901 (1906 Löbbecke); see also Curtis, V.S., *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[950] Walser (1966), delegation XI, pl. 18.
[951] Inagaki, *et al*. (2002), 98; Curtis, J. (2004), 334; Merrillees & Sax (2005), 108-109. Other miniature weapons from the Oxus Treasure include arrows, long spears and swords.
[952] Moorey (1985), 25, fig. 3.
[953] DNb, 8h, translated in Kent (1950) [1953], 140. See pp. 179-180 above.

that became the new symbol of the ruling kings, and this was reflected in the bronze chalkoi motifs of this period.

The composite bow had made several appearances on the coinage of the Seleucid kings. As mentioned above, it was first shown alongside the club as attributes of the hero-god Herakles. During the reign of Antiochus III, the composite bow was also held by the Seleucid dynastic god, Apollo Toxotes, on the reverse of drachms minted in northern Media – perhaps reflecting the die engraver's more localised understanding of how a bow was fashioned.[954]

Under the Parthian rulers, the composite bow was undoubtedly the weapon of kings, heroes, and victorious armies, both in the present period and in the historical and legendary past. While the weapon was used on the reverse of the bronze coinage (and shown in the hand of the seated Parthian archer on silver issues), it also featured in the monumental architecture of the Nisa. On one of the terracotta metope designs uncovered at the citadel, the Parthian bow in a case was shown with a diverse group of designs, and has been interpreted as a heraldic symbol of the dynasty and its royal and military power.[955]

A second metope from the citadel of Nisa shows the club of Herakles. This design has been interpreted as a similar heraldic symbol for the Graeco-Bactrian Euthydemid dynasty. This dynastic family was overthrown by Eucratides I (c. 171-145 BC), who in turn suffered a defeat at the hands of Mithradates I sometime between c. 165-155 BC.[956] Under Euthydemus I, a new standard type had been introduced on silver coinage, showing the image of a weary Herakles on the reverse, holding a club and resting on a rock.[957] The new club type on Mithradates II's bronze coinage appears with two variations: one shows the weapon with the more usual knobbly surface (where tree branches have been removed and filed down), while the second shows these in a more

[954] See p. 131 above.
[955] Pugačenkova (1958), 96-97; Gaslain (2006), 248; Invernizzi (2010) [2010]; *ibid*. (2011b), 659-660.
[956] Invernizzi (2010) [2010].
[957] Bopearachchi (1991), 47, 154-159 (series 1-16), pls. 2-3.

spiked form across the surface of the club.[958] Like the bow, the club is evocative of a legendary, heroic age. The mace-of-one-blow that is wielded by Rostam is famous in the hero's exploits against lions, demons, monsters and witches.[959] When Rostam chooses his horse Rakhsh in the *Shahnameh*, he jubilantly claims, "This will be my mount […] He will be able to bear the weight of my armour, helmet, and mace, and my mammoth body."[960] Additionally, in the *Yashts*, the legendary Kayanid Wishtaspa is said to strike down the enemies of Zarathustra's religion using a heavy cudgel, and a bow and arrow.[961] Thus, these weapons are again associated with royal warriors of Iran's legendary past, from whom the Arsacid dynasty claimed descent through Kay Arash.

The bow and club are also prevalent in the divine exploits of the Iranian *yazata* Mithra. Mithra drives his chariot pulled by four white stallions, armed with a thousand well-made bowstrings, a thousand sharp-piercing spears, a thousand steel hammers, a thousand swords, a thousand maces of iron, and finally a beautiful club "with a hundred knobs, with a hundred blades, a feller of men as it swings forward, cast in strong golden bronze, the strongest of weapons, the most victorious of weapons. It flies from the supernatural realm, it falls from the supernatural realm onto the heads of the daēwas."[962] With the appearance of the club on Mithradates II's bronze chalkoi towards the end of his reign, it is possible that the Arsacid king sought to evoke the martial qualities of his namesake, the *yazata* Mithra, as well as of the kings of Iran's past.

Victory Goddess

[958] Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).
[959] Maguire (1974), 138.
[960] Davis (2007), 132.
[961] Yt. 13.99-100, translated in Malandra (1983), 115: "99. We worship the Frawashi of righteous Kawi Wishtāspa, brave, personifying the Word, the ahuric wielder of a heavy cudgel, who with bow and arrow sought open space for Truth, who with bow and arrow found open space for Truth, who stood prepared for this ahuric Zarathushtrian Religion as arm and support, 100. Who freed her (the Religion) who was stationary, being bound, from (her) fetters, (who) set her down (so that she was) sitting in the middle, ruling on high, unshakable, righteous, abundant in cattle and pastures, happy about (her) cattle and pastures." See also Yt. 19.84-87.
[962] Yt. 10.128-132, translated in Malandra (1983), 74.

The bronze issues of Mithradates II that depict the goddess Nike are unique in two ways. Firstly, before Mithradates II's time, the motif of the victory goddess was used intermittently, seemingly to mark specific victories won by the Arsacid kings. Under Mithradates II, however, she became a permanent feature on the king's hemi-chalkoi, and later on his dichalkoi. Secondly, Nike was the only remaining Greek anthropomorphic deity to be depicted on Mithradates II's principal bronze coinage from the Iranian highlands.[963] The role of Nike in Parthian ideology is rather ambiguous. Whilst she is understood as a victory goddess in the Hellenistic world (and often depicted carrying a trophy or laurel wreath on Seleucid coinage), in Parthian art and coin iconography, she instead carries a sceptre or victorious palm branch and, most importantly, the royal diadem. She is, therefore, seemingly connected to ideas about the king's divine *khvarnah* and legitimacy to rule, and has been connected to the *yazatas* Anahita and Ashi, from whom kings and warriors request boons to be granted victories and ultimately the *khvarnah*.[964]

Coins of the Kushan king Huvishka, ruling much later between AD 140-180, provide an interesting parallel. The image of the winged goddess Nike carrying a sceptre and diadem, and standing next to the dynastic tamgha symbol was struck onto the reverse of this king's gold coinage (Figure 66). The Bactrian inscription, however, names this female divine being as Oanindo of the Kushan pantheon – the male *yazata* Vanant in the Mazdaean tradition.[965] Vanant is also known as the "star of the west", and accompanies the star Sirius (or Tishtrya) across the sky.[966] In *Yasht* 8, addressed to Tishtrya, Vanant is worshipped "for well-built strength, for Ahura-created Victoriousness, for

[963] At the mint of Susa, which struck a more local variety of bronze coin motifs (see below), several deities that were iconographically Hellenistic in style were depicted on the reverse of various issues, e.g. S26.32 showing "Athena standing facing with spear and shield"; S27.14, "bust of Artemis facing"; S27.27, "Apollo seated right on omphalos"; S28.22, "Artemis standing right with bow"; descriptions cited from Sellwood (1980). In addition, a rare bronze issue from an unknown mint, perhaps in Margiana, shows on the reverse an archer deity (Apollo or Artemis?) standing facing, holding a bow in one hand and reaching for an arrow from a quiver with the other hand; see Bertolami Fine Arts Auction 37 (19 Sep 2017), lot 199 = CNG 90 (23 May 2012), lot 786; JHE, VCoins (10 Jul 2007), item E653 = Frank Kovacs, VCoins (22 Nov 2006), item 4922; Loginov & Nikitin (1996), 44-45. no. 12; Curtis, V.S. *et al*. (forthcoming 2018).

[964] Curtis, V.S. (2007a), 42; *ibid*. (2007b), 420-423; *ibid*. (2012a), 71-73.

[965] Rosenfield (1967), 91-92; Cribb & Bracey (forthcoming), E.G1v. (19). See p. 70, note 232 above.

[966] Yt. 21; Panaino (1989b).

conquering Superiority, for the ability to overcome trouble, and to overcome enmity."[967] As noted by Shenkar, it is unclear whether an association between the image of the Greek Nike and the Avestan Vanant of the *Yashts* existed under the Parthian kings, let alone as early as the 2nd-1st centuries BC.[968] Mithradates II's wider coin iconography, nevertheless, touches on imagery that may be associated with the divine Tishtrya and similar themes.

II. Bronze Coinage the West of the Parthian Empire

Susa, *Western Iran*

Bronze coin issues minted during the reign of Mithradates II at the city of Susa provide a stark contrast to those from this king's principal mints in the Iranian highlands. The mint at Susa struck the chalkous denomination throughout the majority – if not the whole - of Mithradates II's reign, and frequently changed the reverse design. The same reverse designs are often repeated from reign to reign during the Arsacid period, indicating that the mint officials at Susa had an iconographic repertoire from which they selected their motifs. The decision about what to strike on the reverse of the coin was most likely made by these mint officials, rather than from direct royal instruction.[969] It was suggested by le Rider that the reverse designs were changed annually; however, the administrative details behind this particular method of issuing coins remains inconclusive.[970]

Although the Susa chalkoi bore the royal title in their legends and so can be considered as part of the wider royal coinage of the Arsacid kings, these issues were unique in that they were at least partly administrated within the civic sphere. The right to mint a civic coinage was a highly sought-after privilege, since it allowed the city to make a profit from this activity.[971] The city of Susa

[967] Yt. 8.12, translated in Malandra (1983), 144-145.
[968] Shenkar (2014), 152.
[969] Debevoise (1938), xli; le Rider (1965), 375-376; Sellwood (1983), 285;
[970] Le Rider (1965), 389. See Mørkholm (1980), 41, who disagrees that the Susa bronzes coin types can be used to fix a precise chronology.
[971] Mørkholm (1967), 82; *ibid*. (1982), 302.

was, indeed, a significant centre in the ancient Near East: it had served as a principal city during the Elamite period from c. 2400 BC, as well as later during the Achaemenid period after its capture by Cyrus the Great in 539 BC. An Achaemenid palace was founded by Darius I here in c. 519 BC, and was symbolically built by the labours of many subjects from around the empire.[972] According to Herodotus, the Royal Road of the Achaemenid kings stretched between Sardia and Susa.[973] Moreover, the Elamite language was used under the Persian kings as one of three official languages (alongside Old Persian and Babylonian). In the Hellenistic period, Susa continued to play a significant role in the geopolitical developments of the time. Western authors note the wealth that Alexander of Macedon encountered in the Susian treasury during his conquest of the Persian Empire - more than forty thousand talents of gold and silver bullion, as well as a further nine thousand talents of golden darics, according to Diodorus Siculus.[974] A mint was established in the city by the end of Alexander's reign, and continued to operate under his successors.[975] Under the early Seleucids, Susa was re-founded under the name of Seleucia-on-the-Eulaios, and a Graeco-Macedonian community was subsequently settled here.[976] Its role as a commercial centre has been noted in scholarship: bronze coinage from the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris has been found in Susa, and is indicative of the extensive mercantile activity carried out between the two cities.[977]

The city of Susa was captured by the Parthian Mithradates I soon after this king's conquest of Mesopotamia in 141 BC; here, Mithradates I struck a small handful of chalkoi types before his death in around 138 BC (according to

[972] Strabo, 15.3.2. See Kent (1950) [1953], 142-144 for the Foundation Charter of Darius I (DSaa, DSf) on the building work that was carried out on the palace at Susa. On the general history of Susa, see Vallat (2008) [2008] for the Elamite period; Boucharlat (2009) [2009] for the Achaemenid period & Martinez-Sève (2015) [2015] for the Hellenistic and Parthian periods with further bibliography.
[973] Herodotus, 5.52-54. See also Tallis (2005), 213.
[974] Diodorus, 17.66.1-2. Curtius Rufus, 5.2.11 and Arrian, 3.16.7 state fifty thousand talents of uncoined silver, while Plutarch *Alexander*, 36.1 and Justin, 11.14 state forty thousand talents of coined silver. See also Strabo, 15.3.21.
[975] Kritt (1997) 48-49; Capdetrey (2007), 34. See also Houghton & Lorber (2002), 3-4, 67-77 for minting activity in Susa under the Seleucids.
[976] Le Rider (1965), 280 suggests that the re-founding was carried out by Seleucus I; Tarn (1938) [1985], 27 proposes Antiochus III; and Capdetrey (2007), 365 suggests Antiochus I.
[977] McDowell (1935), 180 with reference to Dieudonné (1929), 32.

Sellwood's chronology), or 132 BC (according to Assar's).[978] His successor, Phraates II, introduced a Parthian tetradrachm type to the mint (showing Apollo on the reverse, seated on an omphalos, holding bow and arrow), and he continued to strike the bronze chalkoi units.[979] Artabanus I generally maintained this level of minting activity, despite some difficult years when the Elymaean rebel Pittiti carried out raids in the wider region until his defeat in 125 BC.[980] Artabanus I's tetradrachms subsequently adopted a victorious palm branch into the reverse iconography, shown in the hand of the seated Apollo.[981] At the start of Mithradates II's time in power, the mint of Susa continued to produced the rare series tetradrachms showing Apollo seated on the reverse (still with the palm branch in hand), and introduced a drachm type (showing the Parthian archer on the reverse, sitting on an omphalos and holding a bow).[982] These were not continued into the later years of Mithradates II's reign. The bronze coinage, on the other hand, was struck almost continuously throughout Mithradates II's reign – perhaps until this city was captured by a rival Arsacid king.[983] Throughout his reign, Mithradates II struck at least 25 iconographic types (though some of these types were repeated with different legend variations).[984]

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[978] S12.26-29; Assar (2003), 7-8; *ibid*. (2005), 44-45.

[979] S14.1-6.

[980] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -124, B Rev., 18; see p. 55 above.

[981] S18.2-3, S21.5-9.

[982] For Mithradates II's drachm from Susa, see S24.27 (attributed to the mint of Ecbatana in Sellwood's 1980 catalogue; however the control mark on the reverse is attested on tetradrachm types from Susa, e.g. S18.2). For Mithradates II's tetradrachm type from Susa, see Assar (2006b), 134, fig. 30.

[983] Assar (2006b), 145, 150-151 with table 1. Earlier scholarship has argued for different end dates for Mithradates II's Susa chalkoi, which have been summarised by Assar: le Rider (1965), 391 suggests 94/93 BC or 92/91 BC; Sellwood (1965), 130-131 suggested first a date of 93 BC; then in (1976), 6-7 an earlier date around 95/94 BC; see also Sellwood (1983), 285. Assar, based on his later accession date of 121 BC for Mithradates II, adjusts the end date for this king's Susa chalkoi to 93/92 BC following Sinatruces' victory in this city.

[984] Le Rider (1965), 85-92; Assar (2006b), 150-151, table 1; Curtis, V.S., *et al.* (forthcoming 2018). There is no clear agreement on how to reconcile Mithradates II's annual bronze types from Susa (if the theory that they were struck annually is correct, see note 970 above) with the chronology of his reign; see Simonetta (2009), 146-147, 151, with notes 11, 14. It is thought by some scholars that the the mint of Susa was conquered by a rival Arsacid king, perhaps Sinatruces, towards the end of Mithradates II's reign; le Rider (1965), 391 suggests that Mithradates II's last bronze types from this mint were struck in 94/93 BC or 92/91 BC, based on an accession date of 124/123 BC for this king; Sellwood (1983), 285 gives 94 BC in his latest treatment of the subject; and Assar (2005), 52-53; *ibid*. (2006b), 145-146 gives the date 93/92 BC, based on his revised chronology of Mithradates II's reign, beginning in 121 BC.

The Susa bronze coin issues of Mithradates II initially demonstrated a degree of autonomy in the way that the Arsacid king's portrait and titles were adapted onto the coinage. At the beginning of Mithradates II's reign, the royal bust was depicted facing to the right, continuing the tradition that had been established at the mint during the Seleucid period. The king's titles were shortened, simply reading *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of] King Arsaces', with only a small handful including the king's extended epithets *Megas* 'Great' and *Epiphanes* 'Illustrious'.[985] However, following Mithradates II's adoption of the title 'King of Kings' in 111 BC, changes in the way that the royal portrait was executed are noticeable. From the S27 series, the king's bust was turned to face to the left, in line with Mithradates II's other coin series. The coin legends – although still shortened to exlude the king's epithets 'Great' and 'Epiphanes' – read *ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΑΡΣΑΚΟΥ* '[of the] King of Kings Arsaces'. Only towards the later stages of Mithradates II's reign, do the Susa coin types align more closely with the bronze production from the principal mints of the highlands: on the S28 series, the royal bust faces to the right, and the titles read in full '[of the] Great King of Kings Arsaces, Epiphanes'. On the reverse of these latest issues, the goddess Artemis is shown standing and facing slightly to the right; in one hand she holds a bow, and with the other she selects an arrow from her quiver (Figure 102). The same motif was struck also under later Elymaean kings, and demonstrates the important and enduring role of this goddess in local religion.[986] Classical sources and Greek inscriptions from Susa attest to a temple that was dedicated to the goddess through various names: Artemis, Aphrodite, Diana and Nanaia.[987]

The reverse iconography that was struck at Susa dispayed a large variety of deities, animals and other symbols. Some of these coins appear to show dynastic emblems of both the Arsacid kings (S27.24, bow in a case) and the former Seleucid kings (S23.9 & S26.30, the anchor; S27.27, Apollo Toxotes

[985] S23.5-9, S24.41-44, S26.30-32.
[986] van't haaff (2007), type 14.
[987] Potts (1999), 369, 383; Martinez-Sève (2015) [2015]. See also the S27.14 chalkous type from Susa (Figure 101), which shows the bust of a radiate goddess on the reverse.

seated on an omphalos).[988] Furthermore, the motif of a horned bull's head was struck (S27.18), as well as an eagle in flight (S29.19), an elephant's head (S27.25), and a lion's head (S27.21); Figures 99-100. These symbols can be interpreted from a number of perspectives: the bull held strong associations with the divine world in the ancient Near East,[989] as well as images of the bird-of-prey.[990] The elephant had often been used by the Seleucids and their successors to symbolise eastern conquests in Bactria and India, and to make statements about the military power in their possession.[991] The lion had been a prominent symbol of kingship in the art of the Achaemenid kings, appearing on architecture, seals, and (its paws) as part of the royal throne legs.[992] Other symbols depicted on the Susa bronze chalkoi include a crescent moon (S27.15) and a flower motif (S27.16-17); Figures 97-98.

The selection of motfs across the Susa chalkoi demonstrate an interesting blend of Hellenistic and ancient Near Eastern imagery, all of which merit further examination in the context of this important city and its history.[993] In terms of royal Arsacid ideology, the chalkoi demonstrate that Susa was permitted to self-administrate its bronze minting activity so long as Arsacid supremacy was acknowledged. By the end of Mithradates II's reign, it appears that the influence of the royal Arsacid sphere had become more particular on the coin types, with the portrait and titles reflecting the same standard that was set in this king's principal mints of the highlands. Le Rider has noted that some chalkous 'Club' and dichalkous 'Nike' coin types resembling those of the principal mints have been excavated at Susa, perhaps indicating changing patterns in the circulation of bronze coinage.[994]

[988] The bow was, of course, also an important symbol for indigenous populations; see p. 172, note 594 above.
[989] See pp. 215-217 on taurine imagery.
[990] See pp. 181 ff. on imagery associated with the Varegna bird.
[991] See pp. 216 ff.
[992] See pp. 100, 122, 158 above.
[993] For example, see le Rider (1965), 287-296 on the diverse religious iconography on Susa coin issues, particularly with reference to the cult of Artemis-Nanaia.
[994] Le Rider (1965), 91-92, nos. 145-146.

Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, Central Mesopotamia

The only dated coins that have been attributed to Mithradates II are thought to have been struck over the top of bronze issues of the Characenian king Hyspaosines, who had seized power in Mesopotamia briefly in 127 BC and later died from illness in 124 BC.[995] These two units (the larger showing a cornucopia on the reverse, and the smaller showing a bow in a case on the reverse) were found in a hoard from Babylon, and presumably date to 122/121 BC (according to the Seleucid-Macedonian calendar).[996] It is thought that they were overstruck in the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, or in the Characenean capital of Charax Spasinu.[997] The obverse shows an Arsacid-style portrait, with rather genaralised features. The legend on the reverse reads simply '[of] King Arsaces'. This act of overstriking coin types of Hyspaosines about two years after his death has been considered by Simonetta, who acknowledges the oddity of the specimens – firstly, since they were struck in a mint (Seleucia) that normally produced civic bronze coinage; secondly, since the larger cornucopia types were dated, unlike all other coins of Mithradates II; and thirdly, since these small, less valuable issues seem to have been overstruck on Hyspaosines' coins with the intention to remove the latter from circulation.[998] Simonetta continues, "the most simple explanation of this apparently massive overstriking was that it was done when Mithraadtes II finally recovered full control of Seleucia and decided to obliterate all traces of Hyspaosines' [prior] invasion."[999] This, however, does not explain the gap of two years between the death of Hyspaosines in 124 BC, and the re-striking of the bronzes in 122/121 BC.

In addition to the royal coin types overstruck on bronze issues of Hyspaosines, the mint of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris appears to have minted a civic coinage during the reign of Mithradates II, demonstrating its privileged position

[995] Sachs & Hunger (1996), no. -123, A Obv., 18.
[996] S23.4 and variant 'bow' type. See IGCH 1779; Allotte de la Füye (1919), 74-75; Newell (1925), 5; McDowell (1935), 203; le Rider (1965), 387; Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[997] Allotte de la Füye (1919), 74; Le Rider (1965), 387-388; Newell (1925), 12-15.
[998] Simonetta, A. (2006), 43.
[999] *Ibid*.

within the Parthian Empire as a former capital of the preceding regime.[1000] These depicted on the obverse the bust of the local city goddess, Tyche; while the reverses showed, following Sellwood's catalogue descriptions, either a "god left [and] goddess right standing facing each other, [holding] cornucopiae, [with an] altar between", or a "goddess enthroned left holding Nike and cornucopia".[1001] The legend reads *ΣΕΛΕΥΚΕΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΣΤΩΙ ΤΙΓΡΕΙ* '[of the people of] Seleucia-on-the-Tigris'. Like the semi-civic coinage of Susa, the striking of a civic bronze coinage in Seleucia-on-the-Tigris was permitted under the Arsacid king. This system allowed the city to earn a profit from the striking of its own small coinage.[1002] Further studies on the Seleucia and Susa bronze coin types may shed light on how the weights and diameters of these objects were affected during the reign of Mithradates II in comparison to the principal bronze issues of the Iranian highlands that underwent certain reforms in this period.

Nineveh, Northern Mesopotamia

The final evidence for civic or semi-civic groups of bronze coinage from the time of Mithradates II comes from a hoard discovered in Nineveh on the eastern bank of the Tigris River (northern Iraq).[1003] Just under 600 bronze coins were unearthed in this hoard, and all of a very small weight and diameter in comparison with contemporary bronze emissions from the Parthian Empire. While some of the bronze types appear to show the diademed portrait of Mithradates II on the obverse, the majority of these bronzes show blank obverse designs. Additionally, these specimens seem to be largely an-epigraphic; only a single specimen of the 597 Nineveh bronzes shows any hint of a legend.[1004] Without further information, it is not possible to know whether these all belong to the reign of Mithradates II, or whether only some do.

[1000] S92.2, S92.3A-P.
[1001] Sellwood (1980), 297-298.
[1002] Mørkholm (1967), 82; *ibid*. (1982), 302.
[1003] IGCH 1781; le Rider (1967).
[1004] Le Rider (1967), no. 597, on the advice of G.K. Jenkins, suggests that the partially visible legend '[…]ΣΤ[…]' may be part of a civic inscription, such as those found on bronze issues from Seleucia, i.e. *ΣΕΛΕΥΚΕΩΝ ΤΩΝ ΠΡΟΣΤΩΙ ΤΙΓΡΕΙ* '[of the people of] Seleucia-on-the-Tigris'. The combination of the letters 'Σ' and 'T' does not fit with any royal name or title of a Seleucid or Arsacid king.

Nevertheless, the choice of reverse iconography strongly reverberated with the standardised motifs of Mithradates II's principal bronze coin types that have already been discussed above. These include the image of a horse walking to the left or right, a horse head facing left or right, and Nike walking with a palm branch (?) and diadem to the left or right.[1005] While the small size of these bronze coins from Nineveh indicate that they served a localised economy, the use of the king's portrait and the standardised reverse motifs from the principal mints suggests that the royal Arsacid sphere played a significant influence on this semi-civic mint.

The city of Nineveh, though not the principal city of the wider region of Adiabene, appears to have held a special status under the Parthians. Once a capital of the Assyrian Empire, it may have been re-founded in the Hellenistic period, perhaps during Seleucus I's efforts to establish colonies of Greek or Macedonian communities at strategic points in Mesopotamia.[1006] Nineveh stood on the river Tigris, and archaeological finds indicate that it was a prosperous centre of trade.[1007] In addition, Adiabene was located westwards of Media Atropatene, and south of Armenia – regions where Mithradates II was militarily active during his reign.[1008]

Overall, the known types of civic and semi-civic bronze coinage that were minted during the reign of Mithradates II come from the western reaches of the Parthian Empire. In contrast to the more tightly controlled mints of the Iranian highlands, the municipal mints in Susa, Seleucia and Nineveh appear to differ individually, and show varying degrees of autonomy in the administration of their bronze emissions. While Seleucia's civic coinage shows no mark of the royal administration in its iconography or legends, the S23.4 royal issues overstruck on Hyspaosines' coinage demonstrate that the Parthian king could enforce decisions within this municipal mint as required. Likewise at Susa, royal

[1005] Le Rider (1967), 5-11; see also Curtis, V.S. *et al.* (forthcoming 2018).
[1006] Le Rider (1967), 4; Reade (1998), 68.
[1007] Reade (1998), 66. See Curtis, J. (1976) on gold objects that were found at Nineveh, and which date to the Parthian period.
[1008] See p. 52 above.

interference in the bronze types appears to have become stronger in the later years of Mithradates II's reign, with the iconography and legends starting to mirror the principal royal bronze coinage of the Iranian highlands. While the Susa bronze coinage, until this point in time, had demonstrated a wide variety of motifs on the reverse of the coinage, the imagery on the Nineveh bronzes parallels that of the principal mints. Further research into these bronze types and the manner in which they were minted within the framework of coin production in the Parthian Empire may help to shed further light on royal political ideology, as well as the political practicalities of maintaining power over an imperial territory.

- Conclusion –

The aim of this thesis has been to examine the extensive Parthian coin evidence of the 2nd and 1st centuries BC, against the other extant primary and secondary sources of this period, in order to shed light on the political and religious ideologies of the time. During these centuries, the Parthian Empire reached its territorial apex under Mithradates II. The coin evidence plays a central role in understanding how Parthia perceived itself as a legitimate and divinely empowered imperial power, as the conqueror of the Hellenistic regime in the East, as the heir to a long succession of ancient near eastern kings and traditions, as the sovereign power over vassal kingdoms and neighboring territories, and as the rival to rising generals and emperors in Rome and China. The sphere of influence commanded by the Parthian kings endured for almost half a millennium, until the rise of the Sasanian dynasty in AD 224. To contrast this great achievement, the origin story that has been passed down to the modern era describes the humble beginnings of the Arsacid dynasty amongst the northern Scythian tribes in the mid-3rd century BC. How the Arsacid kings bridged this transition from nomadic state to imperial power has created more questions than answers in modern studies of the Parthian period.

The first chapter in this thesis examined how this political transition took place according to the secondary accounts of foreign observers in the Graeco-Roman and Chinese spheres. These sources (particularly those from the Graeco-Roman authors) have provided modern historians with the foundation of what we know today about the rise of the Arsacid kingdom and its military expansion. Nevertheless, they are inherently challenging due to the biases, inaccuracies and problems of interpretation that come with them. These written histories, geographies, biographies and other treatises from the classical world were assembled using distanced observations of the Parthian Empire, with information garnered from travellers, merchants and soldiers who had contact with this part of the world. On top of the complications in the transmission of these sources, the western authors were also writing from a perspective that was often incongruous with the landscape of the Iranian world.

Their accounts are shaped by terminology that framed the East as a region where established cities created centres of civilisation in contrast to sprawling lands that were roamed by nomadic peoples. In the Greek world, the foundation of the *oikos* (a household unit based on ecological, social and cultural bonds) defined spaces that were inhabited (*oikoumene*), where land was cultivated; common language, customs and rituals were shared; and the rule of law provided a framework for governance. The uninhabited lands (*aoiketos*) were uncultivated, possessed no fixed centre of government or ritual performance, and lacked the shared values that defined Greek identity. This binary opposition between Greek cities and nomadic landscapes was projected especially onto the Upper Satrapies of the Seleucid Empire, where the descendants of Alexander resided in colonial outposts situated on the precipice of the "barbarian" world.

The underlying ideology of the Graeco-Roman accounts presents a very simplistic narrative. The rise of the Arsacid dynasty in the north-eastern satrapy of Parthia is described as the invasion of a mounted, "barbarian", bow-wielding horde, led by the Parni tribesman Arsaces (I). His successors, arrogant and despotic, carved out an empire for themselves through their fierce military expansion, pushing eastwards into Bactria, and westwards into regions including Hyrcania, Media and neighbouring Media Atropatene, Adiabene, Babylonia and Susiana by the end of the 2nd century BC. Kingdoms such as Characene, Elymais and Persis, at times, resisted against Arsacid rule, but were nevertheless surrounded by the dominant ruling dynasty. The account of the Roman Justin states that citizens in Greek cities implored the Seleucid king Antiochus VII (138-129 BC) to march against the Arsacid Phraates II (c. 132-126 BC)[1009] and liberate them from their cruel new rulers.[1010] Other parts of Justin's account claim that Greek captives were rounded up by Phraates II and sent to the eastern frontier to counter further nomadic invasions, inciting great resentment and discontent.[1011] A century later, the same fearsome Parthian warriors crushed the Roman army at the Battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, a fatal reminder of the force behind the skilled mounted archers serving under the

[1009] Regnal dates according to the revised chronology in Assar (2005), 45-47.
[1010] Justin, 38.10.5.
[1011] Justin, 42.1.4-5, 42.2.1.

Arsacid king, Orodes II (c. 57-38 BC). Ten thousand Roman captives, it is recorded, were sent to Margiana in the eastern reaches of the Parthian Empire.[1012] The rise of the Parthian Empire played into the ideology of the Graeco-Roman world and their perceptions of the barbarian enemy, which had been established since the times of the Graeco-Persian Wars of the 5th century BC and the conquest of Alexander in Persia in the 4th century BC. Modern scholarship has largely inherited these perspectives from the ancient written sources, since they mirror an enduring popular narrative of barbarian hordes breaching the walled cities of the civilised world. It is important to recognise these underlying narratives in the secondary sources, which have informed the way we study the Parthian world today. While the Graeco-Roman accounts provide important information and perspectives for the modern reader, these should be examined against the surviving primary source material in order to appreciate fully what these western authors have recorded of the past.

The archaeological material dating to the Achaemenid, Seleucid and Parthian periods demonstrates that the opposition between 'inhabited' and 'uninhabited' territories did not accurately reflect the realities of the landscape - particularly in relation to cities such as Nisa, which was situated on the southern edge of the arid Karakum desert. The western sources do hint at the migratory patterns of tribes in this region between sources of water and pastoral plains, such as the Apasiacae nomads, who are said to have led their horses along a distributary of the Oxus River (perhaps the Uzboy) into Hyrcania.[1013] However, the best sources of evidence for how different nomadic and sedentary communities interacted in this region come from archaeological excavations. Field surveys carried out in northern Afghanistan and southern Uzbekistan demonstrate the co-existence of migratory peoples and inhabitants of cities in ancient Bactria and Sogdiana.[1014] A Graeco-Bactrian leather document attests to the employment of Scythian mercenaries, who were paid in silver drachms. Excavations carried out at Parthian Nisa have uncovered high-value objects of Scythian workmanship. Further afield, a Parthian fortress was

[1012] Pliny the Elder, 6.18.
[1013] Polybius, 10.48.
[1014] Outlined on pp. 117 above.

built on the Uzboy River, and archaeological evidence of nomadic activity has also been recorded in the region. The building of settlements and fortresses shaped these regions, and so did the seasonal movements of pastoralist herdsmen, and the long-distance migrations of displaced tribes. Exchanges in skilled labour and commodities allowed each community to thrive in this environment. Different ideas and traditions were able to meet in the region with the movement of resources, craftsmen, merchants, emissaries, pastoralist herdsmen, horse breeders and conscripted soldiers across the two worlds (nomadic and sedentary) that have been so distinctly separated in the western texts.

In addition, excavated material from the so-called nomadic sphere has demonstrated the lasting impact of the Achaemenid Empire on this region. The practices of diplomatic gift giving, economic exchange, tribute payments and the conscription of military forces had been developed here under the direction of the central Achaemenid court and its provincial officials. The continued use of the imperial Aramaic script, as well as Avestan month and day names (a system established under the Achaemenids), on inscribed objects attest to the legacy of the Persian kings into later centuries. Therefore, the tribal ancestors of the Arsacids were most likely familiar with various institutions of the former Achaemenid imperial administration. The name of the dynastic founder, moreover, is evocative of the Achaemenid past: *Aršak* (Greek Arsaces), meaning 'Ruling over Heroes', was a diminutive form of the Old Persian name *Xšaya-ṛšā* (Greek *Xerxes*).[1015]

The arrival of the Arsacids into the Iranian highlands must also be considered within the wider historical context of population movements. In the early 1st millennium BC, tribal migrations from the north led to the establishment of the Medians in the Iranian Plateau, and the Persians in southern Iran. Though these movements of people occurred long before the historical memory of the Arsacid dynasty, the cultural overlaps that persisted between parts of the Scythian sphere and regions such as Parthia and Media are

[1015] Schmitt (2016), 44, no. 37.

evident – particularly in the costume and weaponry of these groups.[1016] The Achaemenid reliefs showing delegations from across the empire attest to the widespread use of the cavalry suit, for example, across multiple regions.[1017]

The points of discussion outlined above demonstrate that the simplistic narrative of the Parni invasion as presented in the western sources was, in fact, a more complex and dynamic development. By taking into account the intermingling spheres of the nomadic and sedentary worlds, the legacy of the Achaemenid kings amongst the Scythian elites, and the enduring cultural overlaps between the northern tribes and the Iranian highlands, we are able to better visualise how the Arsacid rulers transformed from "princes on horseback" to enthroned kings.

Although the early history of the Arsacids can only be reconstructed from problematic written accounts of the western world and sparse archaeological finds, the examination of these sources in this thesis argues that a familiarity with the imperial traditions of the former Achaemenid kings continued into later centuries in territories beyond the frontier of the Seleucid Empire. Arsaces I's invasion of Parthia and his successor's expansion into neighboring territories are viewed as part of the dynasty's own imperial aspirations. The second chapter of this thesis examined the developments in the silver coin iconography of the Arsacid kings as they transformed the Parthian kingdom into an empire. The early Parthian coinage can be viewed as various experimental phases that were frequently developed and adapted as the Arsacid kings absorbed new territories in western Bactria, and in Media and Mesopotamia.

The iconic archer motif of the Arsacid dynasty demonstrates these developments well. According to scholars, the introduction of this figure of Arsacid coinage was seemingly inspired by the coinage of the satrap

[1016] Razmjou (2005b).
[1017] Curtis, V.S. (2000), 25; *ibid*. (2007a), 15.

Tarkamuwa, governing in Cilicia in the 4th century BC.[1018] Like the archer on this Achaemenid period satrapal stater, the seated bowman of the Parthian drachms was depicted in cavalry costume, wearing a diademed soft cap headdress, and seated on a stool with decorative legs in the Achaemenid fashion. The later adoption of the *omphalos* on the Parthian seated archer motif is evidence of the engagement that took place between the iconography of the conquering Arsacid kings and the established traditions in former Seleucid mints. The appearance of the *omphalos* (a symbol of the Seleucid divine ancestor, Apollo Toxotes) on Parthian coinage perhaps celebrated the Arsacid victories over territories once held under the Seleucid regime; or it was perhaps the result of engravers at newly conquered mints adapting the new Arsacid coin motif to the artistic tradition that they were familiar with.

The royal portrait and titles presented on the coinage also underwent various stages of development. The diademed soft cap headdress worn by the clean-shaven Arsaces I was accompanied by titles that reflect the ruler's military conquest in the Parthian satrapy: in Greek and Aramaic script, Arsaces I is identified as an autocrat and a *karenos*, 'commander'. Under Mithradates I, the soft cap headdress was abandoned, and the king was shown wearing the diadem band on its own (a fashion that had been adopted by the Hellenistic kings in the East). Mithradates I was also depicted with a beard reminiscent of those worn by former ancient near eastern kings, such as the Achaemenids. During the reign of Artabanus I, the costume was also shown on the royal coin portraits. This consisted of the V-necked jacket of the cavalry costume, and it was embellished with circular decorations across the lapels and seams. Just as the costume worn by the Arsacid rulers transformed from the riding garb of a warrior to the more decorative regalia of a king, so too did the coin legends develop from the language of upheaval to titles of royal power. The titles 'King' and 'Great King' appeared on coinage in the 2nd century BC, as well as the divine epithet '*theos*'. Comparative evidence from the Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian spheres (whose kings also referred to themselves as 'divine') demonstrates that

[1018] Curtis, V.S. (1993a), 233-234; *ibid*. (2007a), 9 & fig. 5; *ibid*. (2007b), 416-417.

a strong rivalry was underway between these three powers in how they proclaimed their legitimacy and right to rule.

These iconographic developments unfolded over the course of a century or so, between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC. However, with the Parthian Empire consolidated under the power of Mithradates II, the portrait of the king was also consolidated into an established image of Parthian royalty: the naturalistic artistry favoured by the Hellenistic kings had transformed into a more formalised style as seen before on the monumental rock reliefs of the Achaemenid kings and their predecessors in the near east. This was expressed, for example, with symmetrical rows of curls for the king's beard; with more prominent facial features, such as the nose; with the schematic rendering of the torque worn by Mithradates II, spiraling around the king's chest; and with the Parthian jacket that was embellished with rich patterns and decorations (e.g. a star under Mithradates II, and under later kings, the image of Nike, a mythical creature, thunderbolt etc.). The final developments on the silver coinage of Mithradates II underline his imperial aspirations: first the *omphalos* of the iconic Parthian archer was replaced with an Achaemenid-style high-backed throne with decorated legs, and a footrest was introduced under the archer's feet (S26). Secondly, the grand Achaemenid title 'King of Kings' was assumed in the coin legends (S27). Finally, towards the end of the king's reign, the tiara adopted by Mithradates II imparted an aura of royal splendor to the king with its cosmological solar/star and crescent moon decorations.

Any remaining notions in scholarship that Arsacid dynastic art was no more than derivative of Hellenistic iconography (at least with regard to the numismatic evidence) should be dispelled when considering how influential it was in its own right. Although aspects of Seleucid iconography were at first continued under the die engravers, Hellenism had increasingly become decentralised in ideologies concerning political power, particularly with the rise of autochthonous kingdoms such as Parthia, Persis and Elymais.[1019] Mithradates II's kingly image established a new imperial model in the East. Like the

[1019] Strootman (2011a), 82 ff.

Achaemenid kings who had allowed their satraps to strike coinage, the vassal rulers under the Arsacid kings were also given minting rights. From the reign of Mithradates II, their coinages drew from Mithradates II's transformative coin iconography, including the formalisation in the artistic style; the adoption of beards and native costumes with decorative details; and the embracing (by some rulers) of the Parthian tiara. The importance of the Parthian King of Kings' image and how it represented royal power and legitimacy is perhaps best exemplified by its reproduction on coin issues of the Sasanian Ardashir I (c. AD 224-242), who seized power in the region of Persis more than three hundred years after Mithradates II's lifetime. Ardashir I was depicted identically to Mithradates II, with a long, pointed beard, and wearing a spiralling torque, a star-decorated V-necked jacket, and a tall, domed tiara embellished with a central solar/star motif.[1020]

With the adopted title 'King of Kings', Mithradates II portrayed himself as the heir to past imperial legacies. This was a narrative that had seemingly begun with the initial adoption of the seated archer motif (inspired by the prototype of the Achaemenid period satrap Tarkamuwa) under Arsaces I. The royal image under Mithradates II, however, had developed towards specific Arsacid criteria, particularly with the Parthian costume, the decorated tiara, and the exaggerated torque. The iconic winged figure of the Persian kings was not revived in Arsacid art (though the *frataraka* of Persis did include it in their contemporary coin iconography). The re-imagining of Achaemenid imperial ideas was carried out according to the dynasty's own narrative: firstly, their rise to power coincided with the decline of the Hellenistic period, and remnants of the Seleucid administration and its Hellenised centres were absorbed into the Parthian sphere of power; secondly, the Arsacid kings held strong cultural links to the peoples of the Iranian highlands, and the heart of their empire was established in these horse-rearing regions. Unlike the Persian kings of southwestern Iran, the Arsacids represented a northern Iranian power. The imagery employed by the Arsacid kings on their coinage play an important role in visualising the underlying ideologies, identity and tradition of the ruling dynasty. Ideologies

[1020] Alram & Gyselen (2003), Type II, pp. 95-97 with note 20, pp. 116-125.

that concerned kingship and divine legitimacy were also transmitted through performances of religious rituals, and the recitation of heroic poetry in the households of kings and noble families – compositions that are lost to modern scholarship in their original oral form.[1021] Later written transmissions of these hymns and epics present an idea of some of the broader traditions that were shaped and refined during Parthian period, and eventually echoed in the coin iconography and legends of the Arsacid kings.

The second half of this thesis was concerned with the interpretation of the iconography on the silver and bronze coinage, particularly once Mithradates II had consolidated his rule over various kingdoms that now acknowledged the legitimacy of the sovereign Arsacid dynasty. As well as being heirs to the former Hellenistic and Achaemenid empires of recent history, the Arsacid dynasty also claimed its lineage from the ancient Kayanid kings; notably Kay Arash (as known in the *Shahnameh*), a renowned archer of Iran's legendary past when kings battled to established the Good Religion and to claim the Divine Glory for themselves. In the Mazdaean tradition, divine beings similarly battled against Iran's enemies, thundering across battle fields and supplying warrior kings with fast horses, powerful weapons, and the skills to vanquish their enemies.

The image of the archer was an enduring motif in the history of the ancient Near East. In Assyrian palace reliefs (9th-7th centuries BC), kings established their supremacy with the royal bow in hand; above these scenes, the Assyrian winged figure was depicted in a feathered robe with a bow in hand. In the art of the Achaemenid period (6th-4th centuries BC), the archer king is portrayed as the conquering victor, as the suppressor of revolts, and as the maintainer of order. In the inscription accompanying Darius I's (522-486 BC) tomb relief, Ahura Mazda is credited with bestowing the skill of bowmanship on the king. In the Seleucid period, from the reign of Antiochus I (281-261 BC), Apollo Toxotes was appointed as the divine ancestor of the ruling dynasty, and the Greek god was depicted on coinage sitting on an *omphalos*, and testing an arrow in hand while a bow rests at his feet (a composition seemingly inherited

[1021] de Jong (2008), 23.

from the Achaemenid period). Following the Parthian invasion led by Arsaces I, a new royal archer was depicted on the coinage, now dressed in the cavalry costume of Iran's famed mounted archers. This seated archer motif was struck onto the principal denomination (the drachm) until the end of the Parthian period in AD 224. The tradition of the archer king had persisted in the ancient Near East, virtually unbroken, for more than a millennium. The symbol of the royal bow framed these kings as agents of the divine world, carrying out the will of the gods in their martial and heroic exploits on earth.

When Arsaces I conquered the Parthian satrapy in the mid-3rd century BC, the seated archer that was shown on the reverse of his coinage became another iteration of this theme. The royal archer tradition was understood by Hellenistic and native populations alike within the Arsacids' growing sphere of power. However, this archer motif also represented the Arsacid dynasty's own version of this theme – namely, their famed archer ancestor from the age of heroes. The Parthian warrior depicted on coinage is reminiscent of the heroic archer Arash of the Kayanid family, who fought wars in order to establish the Mazdaean religion across ancient Iran. According to this myth, an arrow was shot from the bow of Arash at the conclusion of the war between Iran and its eastern enemy Turan, in order to mark the boundary between these two powers. The story attached to this hero archer was also embedded in the divine world. In *Yasht* 8, the far-shooting skills of the hero (here appearing by the name Erekhsha) are compared to the flight of the bright, white stallion Tishtrya as he flies across the heavens to battle the evil Apaosha on the shores of the Vouru-kasha Sea.[1022] The waters must be released from the heavenly sea to bring rain to the earth; beneath the surface of the celestial waters resides the divine *khvarnah*.

The survival of Parthian elements in the epic literature, such as the heroic section of the *Shahnameh* and the shorter *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, demonstrate that stories concerning royal warriors and their righteous battles were composed by minstrels in the royal domain, and they celebrate the lineage

[1022] Yt. 8.6, 37.

and feats of the Arsacids' legendary ancestors. Aspects of these legendary narratives certainly rang true for the contemporary Parthian kings: by right of conquest, the army of the Arsacids seized territories in the early wars against Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian kings; nomadic incursions on the eastern frontier troubled various Arsacid rulers, who were determined to maintain their monopoly of power in these regions; and in the west of the empire, the rise of Rome created a new enemy for the ruling dynasty. The legendary narratives were, moreover, perhaps represented across public buildings in Old Nisa (like the reconstructed mural showing embattled horsemen on the Tower Building), whilst other ceremonial rooms enshrined images of Arsacid ancestors and helmeted warriors (within the Round Hall or "*heroon"*, and the Square Hall respectively).[1023] In the work of Isidore of Charax, we are told that an everlasting flame was established near the Parthian satrapy in honour of Arsaces I.[1024] Moreover, the use of epithets in the royal titles, such as 'Divine' and 'of a Divine Father', suggests that the Arsacid lineage was connected to the divine world, just as the heroic figure of Erekhsha was connected to the divine Tishtrya. In *Yasht* 8, this *yazata* grants troops of men to his worshippers, as well as herds of horses, amongst other gifts to ensure their victory and prosperity.[1025] Other *yazatas* that fulfill a similar role include Mithra, who is known as the "the far-shooting archer, the warrior manifesting his youthful strength, whom Ahura Mazdā appointed as guardian and supervisor over the prosperity of the whole world".[1026] The onomastic evidence from the Nisa ostraca indicates that these divine beings enjoyed a popular following from the inhabitants of this ceremonial centre.

On the inaugural coinage of Arsaces I, the archer figure seated on the reverse of these issues demonstrates a strong resemblance to the ruler himself. Nevertheless, by the reign of Mithradates I, the royal portrait had taken on a different appearance, while the seated archer's features remained the same. It was perhaps during Mithradates I's reign that the ideology behind the dynasty's

[1023] Invernizzi (2011b).
[1024] Isidore of Charax, §11.
[1025] Yt. 8.15, 17, 19.
[1026] Yt. 10.102-103, translated in Malandra (1983), 71.

celebrated heritage was developed – the establishment of the *heroon* of Old Nisa is attributed to this king, as well as of the Arsacid calendar that dates back to the foundation of Arsaces I in 247 BC. On coinage, each king identified himself by the name 'Arsaces', thus emphasising his lineage to the eponymous founder of the dynasty, who was regarded as a deified ancestor. As outlined above, this name evoked the idea of 'Ruling over Heroes', as is reminiscent of the historical and legendary kings of Iran's past. Amongst the ostraca fragments, the name *Kaw(i)aršak* 'Kay Arsaces' was also attested, reinforcing the connection of the ruling dynasty to the Kayanids of the heroic age.[1027] By the 1st century BC, the image of the Arsacid king had assumed a new role on the tetradrachms that were struck at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. The ruling kings were depicted on the reverse design in the same arrangement as the iconic seated archer motif, and often in the company of divinities conferring the royal diadem or a victorious palm branch on them.[1028] These iconographic developments reflect the changing political pressures of the 1st century BC; nevertheless, these were articulated within the same ideological framework of preceding centuries that focused on the supremacy of the archer king.

The chosen imagery on the reformed bronze coinage of Mithradates II compliments the iconic seated archer motif of the silver denominations. The horse (real and mythological), bow, club and victory goddess continued the theme of the heroic tradition. In the *Yashts*, the bow and club both feature in Mithra's powerful arsenal as he rains down weapons on the heads of the *daevas*. Divine beings driving chariots of soaring horses also feature in the hymns, while the individual *yazatas* Tishtrya and Verethragna take the form of white horses in their divine exploits. Moreover, in these hymns, streams of water become animated like the galloping of horses, while the sun is given the epithet "swift-horsed" as it travels across the sky overlooking the whole world.

In the epic *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, the horse plays a pervasive role in the religious war between Wishtasp and his Mazda worshippers, and Arjasp and the

[1027] Diakonoff & Livshits (2001), no. 1612.
[1028] Curtis, V.S. (1998a), 62; *ibid.* (2000), 25; *ibid.* (2007), 15; *ibid*. (2012a), 71; Sinisi (2014), 15-17.

wicked Hyons.[1029] In the poem, Arjasp sends messengers to Wishtasp, threatening consequences for his acceptance of the Mazdaean religion:

> "But if it please your Majesty, and you give up this pure religion, and be of the same religion with us, then we will pay homage to you as a king and then we will give you, from year to year, plenty of gold, plenty of silver, and plenty of good horses and the sovereignty of many places. But if you will not give up this religion and will not be of the same religion with us, then we will come to attack you. We will eat the green corn of your country and burn the dry, and we will capture the quadrupeds and the bipeds of your country, and we will order you to be placed in heavy chains and distress."[1030]

On the orders of Wishtasp, a cavalry caravan gathers to decide on the open plains "how the demons are beaten at the hand of angels."[1031] These verses echo strongly the episodes recounted in the sacred *Yashts*, in which brave warriors resist marauders and cattle raiders, and where the divine world is called upon to aid riders storming into battle to defend the Good Religion. Certain verses in the *Ayadgar-i Zareran* have been highlighted for their clear traces of the original Parthian narrative.[1032] One in particular, an oath-taking formula, invokes Druvaspa '[Possessing] Sound Horses' to preside over Wishtasp's promise not to assault the foreseer Jamasp ('he who bridles horses').[1033] In the epic, a warrior's ability to ride horses becomes synonymous with the skills of fighting, and is also a mark of prestige: the defeated king Arjasp is sent back to his country without the dignity of his mount, but instead rides humiliated on an ass.[1034] Similarly in the *Shahnameh*, the hero Rostam selects a prized horse to ride with into battles. His steed Rakhsh, it is said, was powerful enough to bear the weight of the hero and his awesome mace.[1035]

[1029] This legendary episode involving Wishtaspa, Zarathustra's first convert, is also known from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, and from the sacred hymn, Yt. 13.99-100.
[1030] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §11-12; translated in Horne (1917), 213.
[1031] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §19-21, 26-27, translated in Horne (1917), 214.
[1032] Boyce (1987b) [2012].
[1033] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §41, translated in Horne (1917), 216.
[1034] *Ayadgar-i Zareran*, §113, translated in Horne (1917), 224.
[1035] Davis (2007), 132.

The accounts of the Graeco-Roman world attest also to the important skills of horse riding and archery amongst the Parthian kings, nobles and military forces. Moreover, they describe various horse sacrifices that were carried out in honour of the Sun or before rivers. In the Chinese sources, the travellers who ventured westwards admired the "heavenly horses" that they encountered, and took stock of the number of archers in each visited region.

While the iconography on the Parthian bronze coinage was drawn from Seleucid and Graeco-Bactrian prototypes, their development into a set repertoire of motifs under Mithradates II reflect the efforts of this king to consolidate his authority over the mints of the Iranian highlands. While the varying bronze coin denominations and designs of earlier kings indicate a lack of coordination across these mints, Mithradates II's reforms created a consistent image that reflected important aspects of Parthian kingship and culture. Similarly, the various mints that produced silver coinage under Mithradates II were increasingly organised according to the activity of the principal Ecbatana mint. The drive to centralise minting production across this region can be understood in terms of the developing historical narrative of this period, with important links to China and to Rome developing across the northern band of the Parthian Empire.

In contrast, the mint at Susa produced bronze chalkoi that served a different region of circulation. These issues have been excavated extensively at the site of Susa, but specimens have also been found in Babylon and Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. Notably, Mithradates II struck a far smaller quantity of coinage in these regions, including the large silver tetradrachms that were typically minted at Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. It was required of the mint at Susa to strike the king's portrait on the obverse (although his bust faced to the right, contrary to other mints); while the reverse contained a shortened version of the king's titles – '[of] King Arsaces' and '[of the] King of Kings Arsaces'. The reverse iconography seems to have been selected by the mint officials *in situ*. This varied iconography differed strongly from that of the principal mints in the highlands. The reason for this may be interpreted as a compromise of sorts made by

Mithradates II, who could not impose his authority over this city of special status. However, monetarily speaking, the region served by the bronze issues from Susa was outside of the principal band of wealth in the highlands. Therefore, it was not a priority of Mithradates II to interfere with the administration of this mint. Nevertheless, the final issues struck under Mithradates II at Susa indicate that the king did adopt a stronger position at this mint: the royal portrait on the obverse was turned to face to the left in line with Mithradates II's other coin issues; and the king's full list of titles was adopted on the reverse legend. The reason behind these changes, however, remains largely unknown.

The aim of this thesis has been to reframe the way the political transition of the Arsacid dynasty from tribal state to imperial power is understood, and to draw attention to the legacy of the Achaemenid kings amongst a wide spectrum of peoples, including those in the Parthian satrapy and in the Scythian territories further north. The success of Arsaces I in the north-eastern region of the Seleucid Empire can be explained by the historical political, economic and cultural overlaps between sedentary and nomadic communities here. The accounts of the Graeco-Roman world mask these intricacies, and do not reflect the historical memory of older, pre-Hellenistic traditions. The coinage of Arsaces I (showing a seated archer figure inspired by an Achaemenid period prototype, and using the title *karenos* 'commander' in Aramaic script) demonstrates, alongside the archaeological material, that this aspect is important in an examination of the Arsacids' origins. The invasion of Arsaces I into Parthia was not simply a narrative appendage to the Seleucids' disintegration, but part of ancient Iran's long history of tribal migrations, close interactions, violent revolt, and empire building.

A second aim of this thesis has been to consider how the Arsacid kings perceived themselves as part of this deep-rooted Iranian tradition. The epic poetry that survives today attests to the ancestral stories that were narrated in the royal court and in the households of noble families. Moreover, these legendary ancestors are known from the Avestan hymns that tell of great warriors and kings battling to obtain the *khvarnah*. By claiming descent from

the famous archer Arash, the Arsacid dynasty was able to interweave its own history into the traditions of the lands they ruled over. The material remains from the Parthian site of Old Nisa appear to follow the same narrative, in which the dynastic kings and their forebearers were celebrated – perhaps even elevated to a divine status in their afterlife. The coinage too tells a similar story: the iconic seated archer motif (which first reflected the image of the warrior invader Arsaces I) was crystalised into an ancestral image during the 2nd century BC as the coin portraits of the ruling kings adapted to their imperial status. By the 1st century BC, the ruling kings had become the protagonists on their largest coin denomination, portrayed on a throne and receiving symbols of victory, kingship and glory from divine figures. The iconography as a whole, despite its Hellenistic veneer, resonated with broad and deep-rooted traditions concerning the royal archer, the *khvarnah*, and the divine world that bestowed these on the king. Parthian influences in the coin imagery of neighbouring kingdoms attest to the power that this iconography held in disseminating ideas about kingship and legitimacy. Although the surface area and design of a coin was particularly small, the system as a whole functioned on a colossal scale across the incorporated nations. The strength of Arsacid period coinage as a primary source lies in its ability to chronicle wide-scale influences in the politics of Parthia, and to examine the narratives of imperial identity and policy in this broad and complex terrain.

ABBREVIATIONS

AA	*Archäologischer Anzeiger*
ACME	*Annali della Facoltà di Filosofia e Lettere dell'Università statale di Milano*
ACSS	*Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia*
AH	*Achaemenid History*
AHR	*The American Historical Review*
AI	*Acta Iranica*
AION	*Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli*
AJA	*American Journal of Archaeology*
AMI(T)	*Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran (und Turan)*
ANSMN	*American Numismatic Society Museum Notes*
AOASH	*Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*
ARTA	*Achaemenid Research on Text and Archaeology*
ASGM	*Atti del Sodalizio Glottologico Milanese*
BAI	*The Bulletin of the Asia Institute*
BBS	*Black Sea Studies*
BM	*British Museum*
BMY	*British Museum Yearbook*
BnF	*Bibliothèque nationale de France*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BzN	*Beiträge zur Namenforschung*
CAJ	*Central Asiatic Journal*
CLI	*Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum*
CNG	*Classical Numismatic Group*
CNRS	*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*
CRAI	*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*

IA	*Iranica Antiqua*
IS	*Iranian Studies*
IGCH	Kraay, C.M., Mørkholm, O. & Thompson, M (eds.) *An Inventory of Greek Coins Hoards*, 1973; New York.
IGLS I	Jalabert, L., & Mouterde, R. (eds.) *Les inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie, Commagène et Cyrrhestique*, 1929; Paris.
IIJ	*Indo-Iranian Journal*
JA	*Journal Asiatique*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBIPS	*Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies (Iran)*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenistic Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JRAS (G.B. & I.)	*Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society (Great Britain and Ireland)*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LBAT	Sachs, A.J. (ed.) *Late Babylonian Astronomical and Related Texts*, 1955; Providence
LNV	*Litterae Numismaticae Vindobonenses*
MO	*Le Monde Oriental*
MSS	*Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft*
NAC	*Numismatica e antichità classiche: quaderni ticinesi*
NC	*Numismatic Chronicle*
NL	*Numismatica Lovaniensia*
NS	*Notae Numismaticae*
NZ	*Numismatische Zeitschrift*
OCD	Hornblower, S. & Spawforth, A. (eds.) *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Third Edition Revised, 2003; Oxford
OCNUS	Quaderni della Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni Archeologici
OGIS	*Orientis Graeci Inscriptiones Selectae*
OIP	*The Oriental Institute Publications*

RAss	Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale
RIC 1	Sutherland, C.H.V. (ed.) *Roman Imperial Coinage*. Volume 1, from 31 BC to AD 69 (revised edition), 1984; London.
RN	*Revue Numismatique*
RRC	Crawford (1974) *Roman Republican Coinage*; Cambridge.
S	Sellwood (1980) *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*, 2nd edition.
SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*
SI	*Studia Iranica*
SNP	*Sylloge Nummorum Parthicorum*
SNR	*Sylloge Nummorum Romanorum*
SRAA	*Silk Road Art and Archaeology*
TPS	*Transactions of the Philological Society*
VDI	*Vestnik Drevnei Istorii*
ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

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FIGURES

GOLD & SILVER COINAGE
PARTHIA

Figure 1: Gold stater of Andragoras (Parthia)

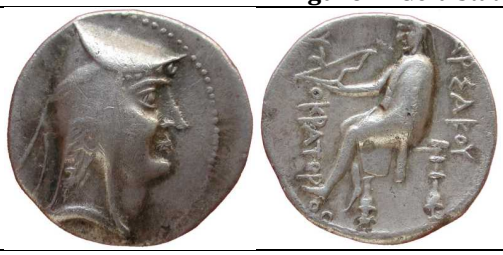

Figure 2: Silver drachm of Arsaces I (S1.1, Nisa?)

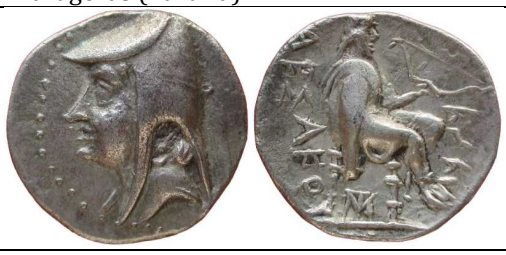

Figure 3: Silver drachm of Arsaces I (S4.1, Nisa-Mithradatkirt?)

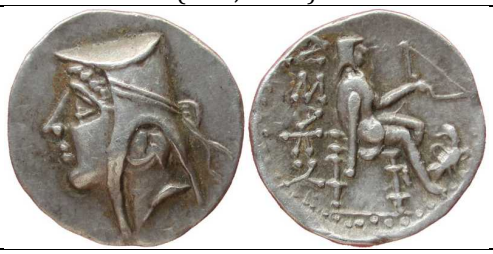

Figure 4: Silver drachm of Arsaces II (S6.1, Rhagae-Arsacia?)

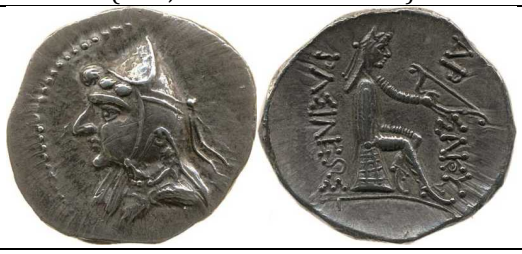

Figure 5: Silver drachm of Phriapatius (S9.1, Hekatompylos?)[1036]

Figure 6: Silver drachm of Phriapatius (S10.15, Hekatompylos?)

Figure 7: Silver drachm of Mithradates I (S10.17, Hekatompylos?)

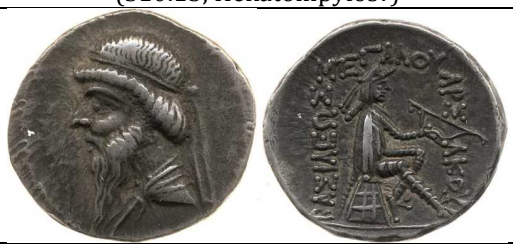

Figure 8: Silver drachm of Mithradates I (S11.1, Hekatompylos?)

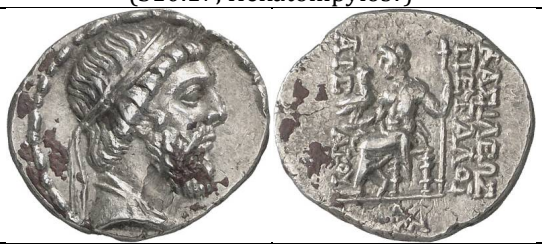

Figure 9: Silver drachm of Mithradates I (S13.6, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

[1036] Assar (2005) described the S9 types as "generic" issues struck for Phriapatius, an unknown king (Arsaces IV), Phraates I and Mithradates I.

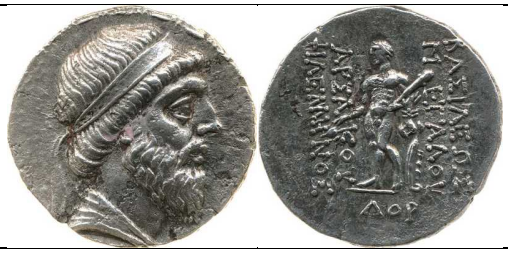

Figure 10: Silver tetradrachm of Mithradates I (S13.5, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 11: Silver tetradrachm of Phraates II (S17.1, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

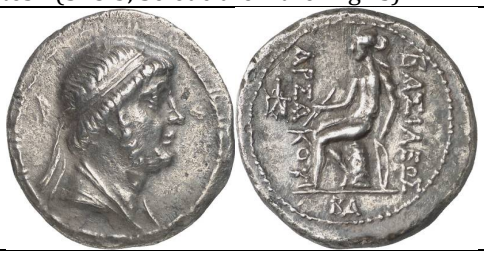

Figure 12: Silver tetradrachm of Phraates II (S14.1, Susa)

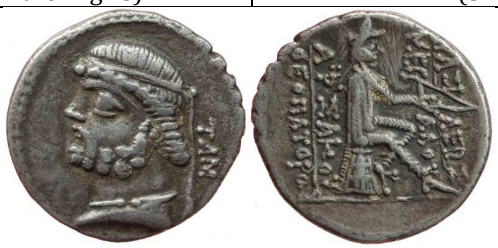

Figure 13: Silver drachm of Phraates II (S16.11, Tambrax)

Figure 14: Silver tetradrachm of Artabanus I (S21.3, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 15: Silver drachm of Artabanus I (S20.5, Margiana)

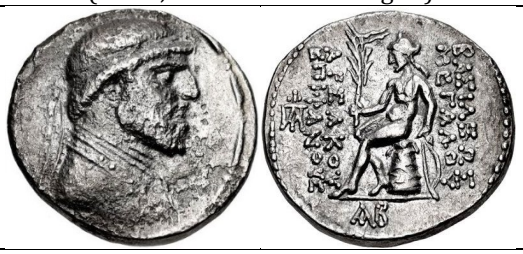

Figure 16: Silver tetradrachm of Mithradates II (Susa)

Figure 17: Silver tetradrachm of Mithradates II (S24.4, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 18: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S24.9, Ecbatana)

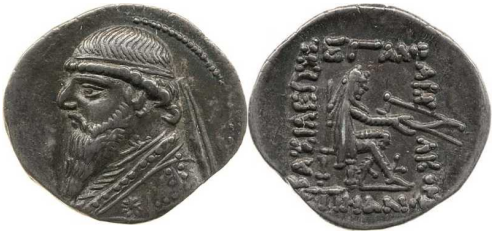

Figure 19: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S26.1, Ecbatana)

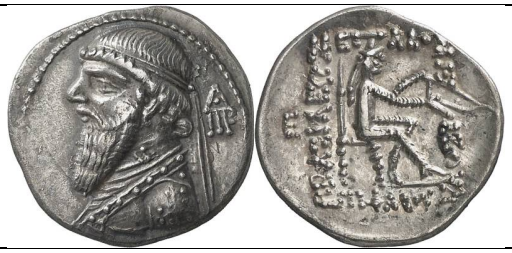

Figure 20: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S26.14, Ecbatana)

Figure 21: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S27.1, Ecbatana)

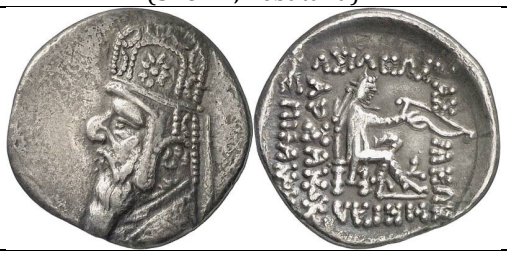

Figure 22: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S28.1, Ecbatana)

Figure 23: Silver drachm of Mithradates II (S28.3, Ecbatana)

Figure 24: Silver drachm of Sinatruces (S33.4, Ecbatana?)

Figure 25: Silver tetradrachm of Phraates III (S39.1, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 26: Silver tetradrachm of Orodes II (S45.1, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 27: Silver tetradrachm of Orodes II (S48.1, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 28: Silver drachm of Orodes II (S42.1, Ecbatana)

Figure 29: Silver drachm of Orodes II (S48.9, Ecbatana)

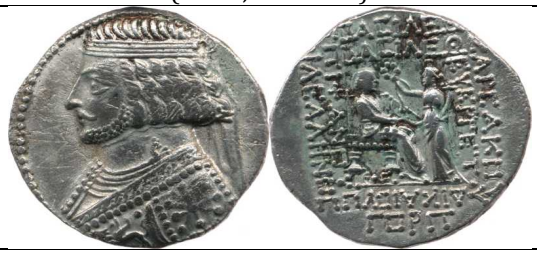

Figure 30: Silver tetradrachm of Phraates IV (S50.2, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 31: Silver tetradrachm of Phraates IV (S54.6, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

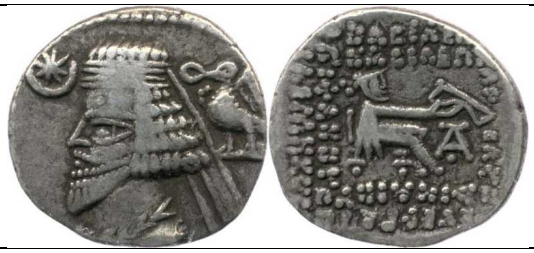

Figure 32: Silver drachm of Phraates IV (S54.7, Ecbatana)

ACHAEMENID PERIOD

Figure 33: Achaemenid gold daric

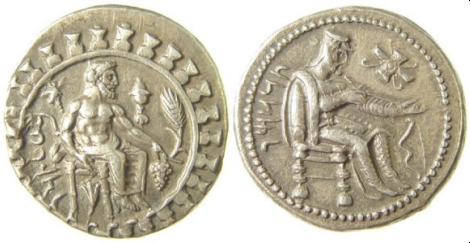

Figure 34: Silver coin of Tarkamuwa/Datames (Tarsus)

ALEXANDER AND THE SELEUCID PERIOD

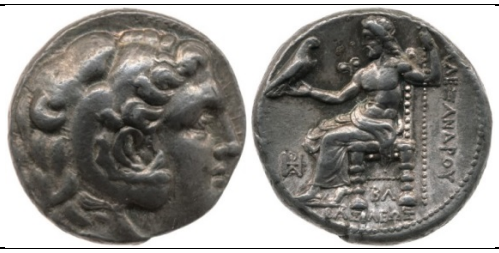

Figure 35: Silver tetradrachm of Alexander the Great (Babylon)

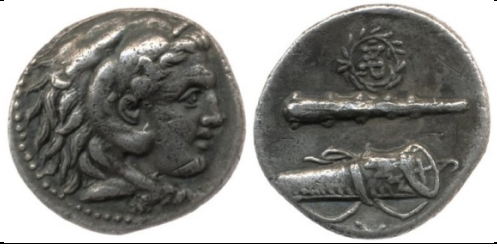

Figure 36: Silver 1/5AR coin of Alexander the Great (Babylon)

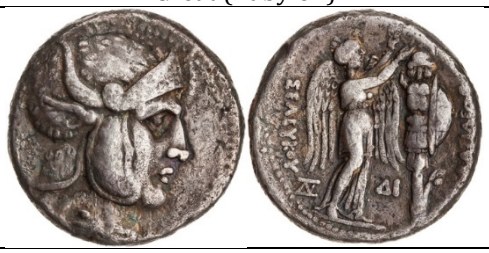

Figure 37: Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I (Susa)

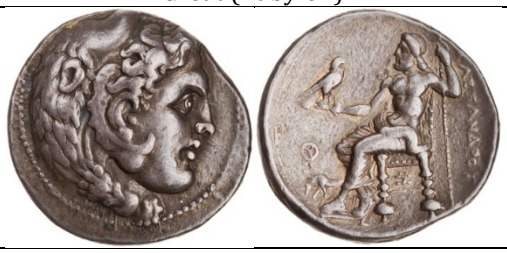

Figure 38: Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I (Ecbatana)

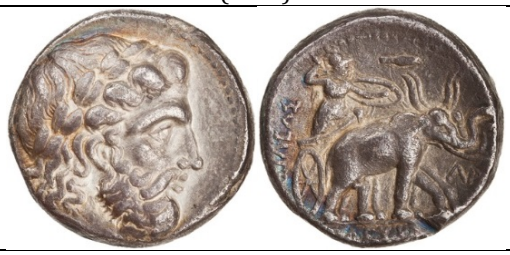

Figure 39: Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I (Susa)

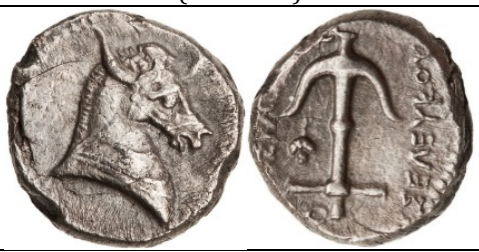

Figure 40: Silver drachm of Seleucus I (Aria, Margiana or Bactria)

Figure 41: Silver tetradrachm of Seleucus I (Ecbatana)

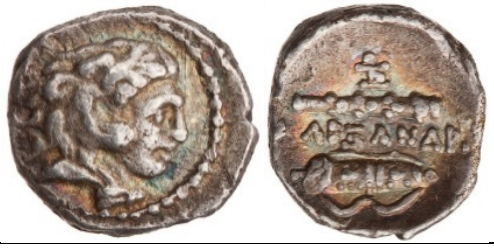

Figure 42: Silver hemiobol of Seleucus I (Ecbatana)

Figure 43: Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus I (Carrhae)

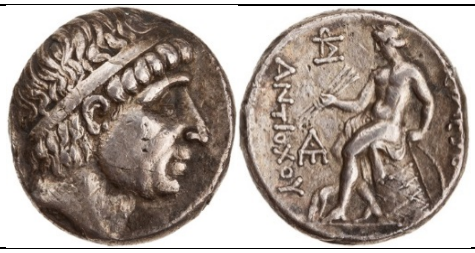

Figure 44: Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus I (Ecbatana)

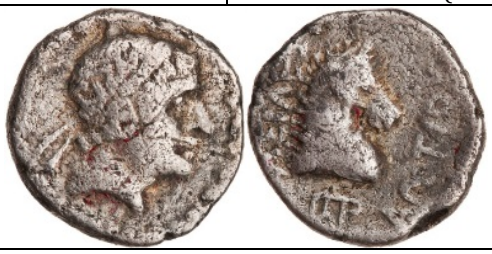

Figure 45: Silver hemidrachm of Antiochus I (Bactria)

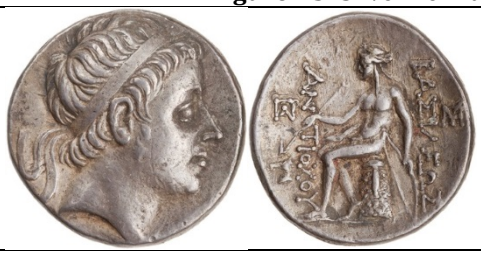

Figure 46: Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus III (Ecbatana)

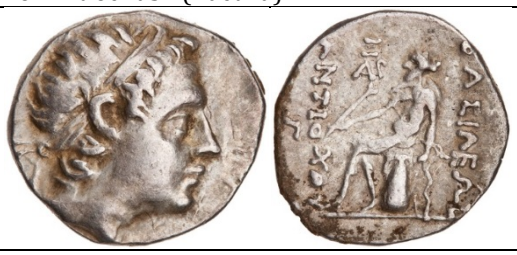

Figure 47: Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus III (Media)

Figure 48: Silver tetradrachm of Antiochus IV (Antioch-on-the-Orontes)

GRAECO-BACTRIAN PERIOD

Figure 49: Silver tetradrachm of Diodotus I (Bactria)

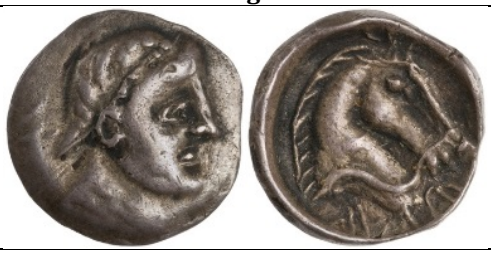

Figure 50: Silver imitation hemidrachm of Antiochus I (issued by Euthydemus I, Sogdiana?)

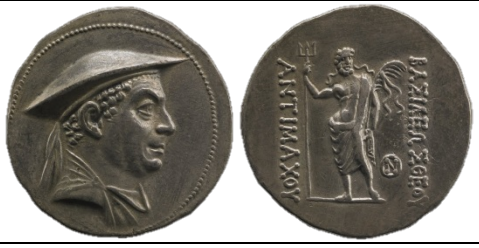

Figure 51: Silver tetradrachm of Antimachus I (Bactria)

PARTHIAN PERIOD - VASSAL AND NEIGHBOURING KINGDOMS

Figure 52: Silver tetradrachm of Bagadat (Persis)

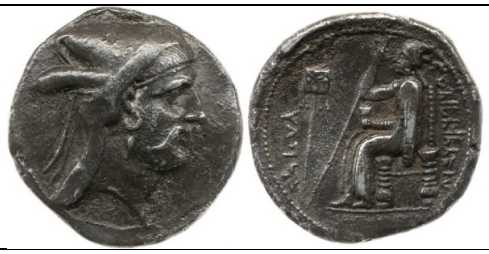

Figure 53: Silver tetradrachm of Bagadat (Persis)

Figure 54: Silver tetradrachm of Vadfradad I (Persis)

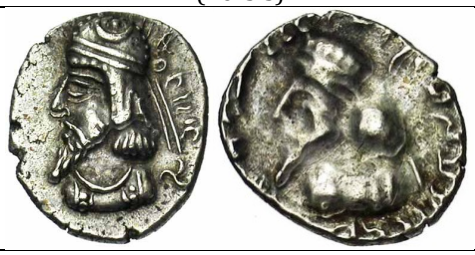

Figure 55: Silver hemidrachm of Vadfradad IV (Persis)

Figure 56: Silver tetradrachm of Kamnaskires II (Elymais)

Figure 57: Silver tetradrachm of Kamnaskires III & Anzaze (Elymais)

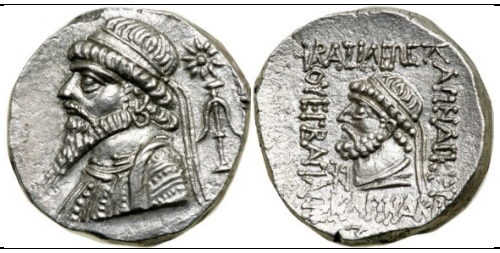

Figure 58: Silver tetradrachm of Kamnaskires V (Elymais)

Figure 59: Silver tetradrachm of Hyspaosines (Characene)

Figure 60: Silver tetradrachm of Apodakos I (Characene)

Figure 61: Silver tetradrachm of Attambelos I (Characene)

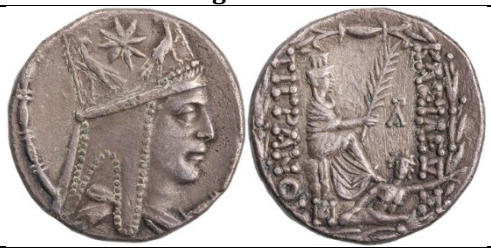

Figure 62: Silver tetradrachm of Tigranes II (Armenia)

Figure 63: Silver tetradrachm of Mithradates VI (Pontus)

Figure 64: Gold coin of Kanishka I (Kushan)

Figure 65: Gold coin of Kanishka I (Kushan)

Figure 66: Gold coin of Huvishka (Kushan)

Figure 67: Silver denarius of Quintus Labienus

Figure 68: Silver denarius of Augustus

Figure 69: Gold aureus of Augustus

Figure 70: Silver denarius of moneyer P. Petronius Turpilianus under Augustus

Figure 71: Gold aureus of Augustus

BRONZE COINAGE
PARTHIAN PERIOD – ARSACID

Figure 72: Bronze dichalkous of Arsaces II (S6.2)

Figure 73: Bronze dichalkous of Arsaces II (S6.2 var.)

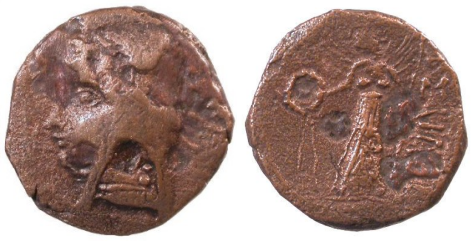

Figure 74: Bronze dichalkous of Arsaces II (S7.2)

Figure 75: Bronze chalkous of Arsaces II (S8.2)

Figure 76: Bronze chalkous of Arsaces II (S8.3)

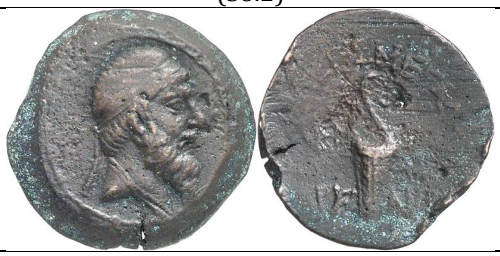

Figure 77: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates I (S12.11)

Figure 78: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates I (S12.12)

Figure 79: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates I (S12.22)

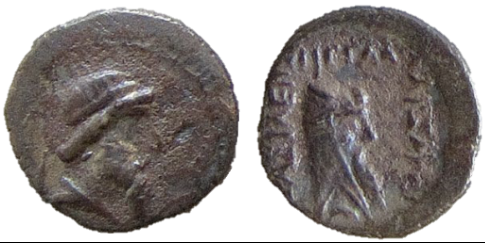

Figure 80: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates I (S12.18)

Figure 81: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (S24.35)

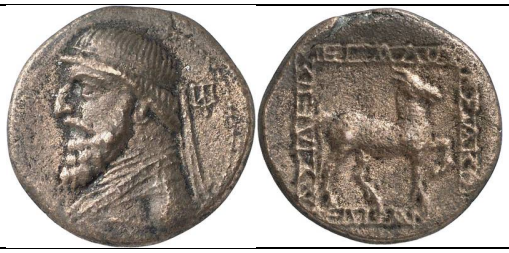

Figure 82: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (S24.34)

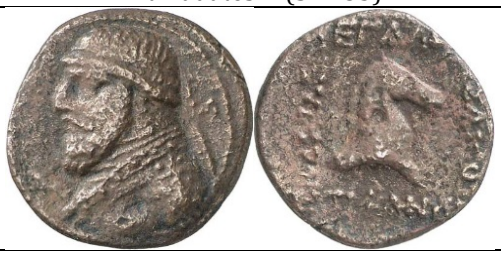

Figure 83: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates II (S24.37)

Figure 84: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates II (S24.39)

Figure 85: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S24.40)

Figure 86: Bronze hemichalkous of Mithradates II (S24.45)

Figure 87: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (S27.6)

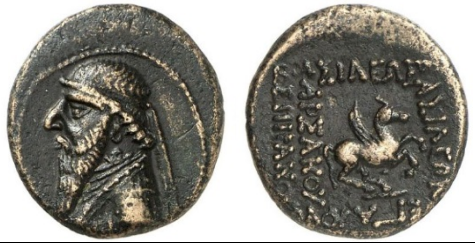

Figure 88: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (S27.7)

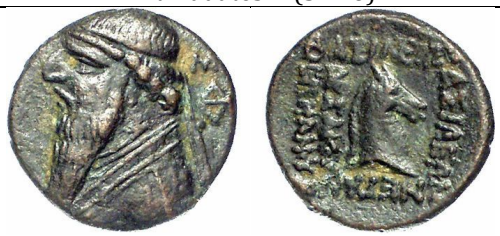

Figure 89: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates II (S27.10)

Figure 90: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates II (S27.11)

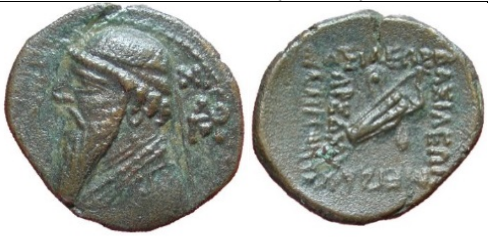

Figure 91: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.13)

Figure 92: Bronze hemichalkous of Mithradates II (S27.28)

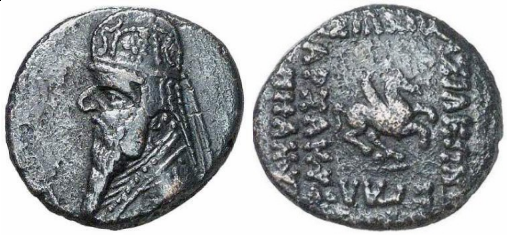

Figure 93: Bronze tetrachalkous of Mithradates II (S28.8)

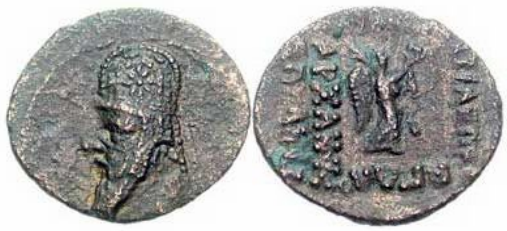

Figure 94: Bronze dichalkous of Mithradates II (S28.11)

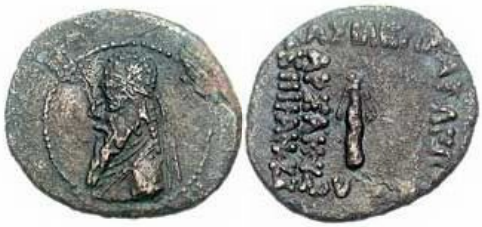

Figure 95: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S28.18)

Figure 96: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S28.19)

Figure 97: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.16-17)

Figure 98: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.15)

Figure 99: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.19)

Figure 100: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.18)

Figure 101: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S27.14)

Figure 102: Bronze chalkous of Mithradates II (S28.22)

SELEUCID PERIOD

Figure 103: Bronze coin of Seleucus I (Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 104: Bronze coin of Seleucus I (Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 105: Bronze coin of Seleucus I (Seleucia-on-the-Tigris)

Figure 106: Bronze coin of Seleucus II (Antioch)

Figure 107: Bronze coin of Seleucus II (Antioch)

Figure 108: Bronze coin of Seleucus I (Ecbatana)

Figure 109: Bronze coin of Seleucus I (Ecbatana)

GRAECO-BACTRIAN PERIOD

Figure 110: Bronze coin of Euthydemus I (Bactria)

LIST OF FIGURES

Coin images have been re-sized for ease of viewing, and are not to scale. The weight and diameter of each coin are provided in the information below, if available.

	25.00mm)
38. 1944.100.73427	American Numismatic Society, New York (17.14g, 26.00mm)
39. 1944.100.73351	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.25g, 24.00mm)
40. 1944.100.74129	American Numismatic Society, New York (4.16g, 15.00mm)
41. Type SC 203	syria.revues.org/docannexe/image/669/img-21.png
42. 1944.100.73448	American Numismatic Society, New York (0.32g, 4.00mm)
43. 1880,0710.1	British Museum, London (16.00g)
44. 1944.100.73522	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.92g, 26.00mm)
45. 1944.100.73647	American Numismatic Society, New York (1.94g, 13.00mm)
46. 1944.100.73634	American Numismatic Society, New York (17.21g, 29.00mm)
47. 1983.69.2	American Numismatic Society, New York (4.10g)
48. 1944.100.75256	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.56g, 34.00mm)
49. 1888,1208.66	British Museum, London (16.75g)
50. 1944.100.74133	American Numismatic Society, New York (2.54g, 18.00mm)
51. 1872,0709.354	British Museum, London (16.97g)
52. 1872,1202.2	British Museum, London (16.90g, 29.00mm)
53. 1854,0405.19	British Museum, London (16.59g, 27.00mm)
54. 1915,0108.10	British Museum, London (16.33g, 33.00mm)
55. PDC 46562	Elsen 93 (15 Sep 2007), lot 452 (1.67g)
56. 1936,0707.3	British Museum, London (16.52g, 27.00mm)
57. 1858,1124.82	British Museum, London (15.70g, 27.00mm)
58. PDC 83253	Goldberg 80 (3 Jun 2014), lot 3376 (11.30g)
59. PDC 26410	Gorny & Mosch 134 (12 Oct 2004), lot 1595 (16.34g)
60. 1947,0406.532	British Museum, London (16.12g)
61. 1922,0419.14	British Museum, London (15.07g)
62. 1944.100.76963	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.20g, 25.00mm)
63. 1980.109.66	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.69g)
64. 1894,0506.17	British Museum, London (7.91g, 20.00mm)
65. 1894,0506.11	British Museum, London (7.94g, 18.00mm)
66. 1879,0501.18	British Museum, London (7.91g, 20.00mm)
67. 1843,0116.207	British Museum, London (3.78g)
68. R.6184	British Museum, London (3.62g)
69. 1864,1128.20	British Museum, London (7.84g)
70. R.6019	British Museum, London (3.98g)
71. R.5994	British Museum, London (7.81g)
72. 1737	Sellwood Collection (16.82g, 12.00mm)
73. PDC 76149	Najaf Chalabiani, VCoins (15 Feb 2012), item 2617 (3.40g, 17.00mm)
74. PDC 58690	Stephen Album List 245 (Jul 2009), item 79966 (4.35g)
75. PDC 84187	CNG 97 (17 Sep 2014), lot 436 (3.09g, 17.00mm)

76.	PDC 79056	Persis Gallery, VCoins (12 Apr 2013), item PA1F
77.	18207984	Staatliche Museen, Berlin (7.34g, 32.00mm)
78.	18207942	Staatliche Museen, Berlin (5.97g, 21.00mm)
79.	FRBNF41791451	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (2.73g)
80.	2001.87.13907	Yale University Art Gallery (0.56g, 10.40mm)
81.	1973.56.1573	American Numismatic Society, New York (7.77g, 21.00mm)
82.	18208875	Staatliche Museen, Berlin (7.52g, 21.00mm)
83.	18208833	Staatliche Museen, Berlin (3.83g, 18.00mm)
84.	18208839	Staatliche Museen, Berlin (3.98g, 18.00mm)
85.	1973.56.1576	American Numismatic Society, New York (1.64g, 15.00mm)
86.	FRBNF41791745	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1.50g, 13.04mm)
87.	PDC 89814	CNG E-Auction 354 (1 Jul 2015), lot 276 (5.55g, 25.00mm)
88.	PDC 80791	Jacquier Auction 38 (13 Sep 2013), lot 134 (3.67g)
89.	PDC 26484	Volker Kricheldorf, eBay (14 Sep 2004), item 3929994409 (4.32g)
90.	PDC 82474	Agora Auctions 5 (18 Feb 2014), lot 270d (2.59g, 17.00mm)
91.	1944.100.82300	American Numismatic Society, New York (2.02g, 17.00mm)
92.	1944.100.82429	American Numismatic Society, New York (1.13g, 20.00mm)
93.	PDC 39565	Peus 388 (1 Nov 2006), lot 364 (4.05g)
94.	PDC 59704	Triton 13 (5 Jan 2010), lot 583f (1.77g)
95.	PDC 59700	Triton 13 (5 Jan 2010), lot 583h (1.34g)
96.	PDC 42526	CNG E-Auction 160 (14 Mar 2007), lot 101 (1.84g, 15.00mm)
97.	1111	National Museum of Iran, Tehran (1.11g, 12.40mm)
98.	FRBNF41792025	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1.42g, 13.92mm)
99.	FRBNF41792064	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1.39g, 13.05mm)
100.	FRBNF41792082	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1.08g, 11.79mm)
101.	FRBNF41792008	Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (1.49g, 13.66mm)
102.	1938,1007.192	British Museum, London (1.27g, 11.00mm)
103.	1944.100.44979	American Numismatic Society, New York (6.17g)
104.	1944.100.44925	American Numismatic Society, New York (15.55g)
105.	1944.100.73364	American Numismatic Society, New York (4.73g, 9.00mm)
106.	1944.100.77006	American Numismatic Society, New York (3.68g, 16.00mm)
107.	1944.100.77003	American Numismatic Society, New York (4.33g, 17.00mm)
108.	1944.100.54039	American Numismatic Society, New York (16.37g, 26.84mm)
109.	1954.203.275	American Numismatic Society, New York (12.73g,

	28.00mm)
110. IOC.5	British Museum, London (3.77g, 18.00mm)

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